

# SOLARIO THE TAILOR

WILLIAM BOWEN



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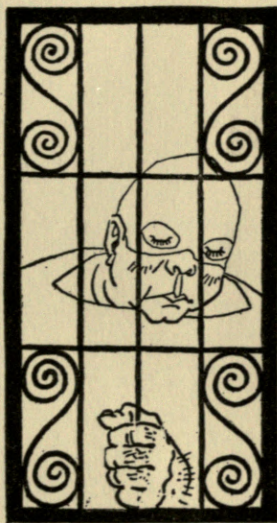






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## SOLARIO THE TAILOR



Mortimer the Executioner



"Then I will begin," said Solario, the Tailor, "the story of——"



# SOLARIO THE TAILOR

*HIS TALES OF THE MAGIC DOUBLET*

BY  
WILLIAM BOWEN

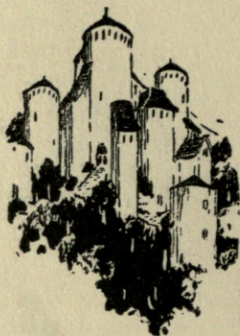


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## TO BE READ FIRST

**I**N the book called "The Enchanted Forest" it is related— But I hope that you have read that book, or at least that you sincerely intend to do so as soon as you have time, but no matter; it is all about a Forest Kingdom, and a Great Forest that was enchanted by a witch, an irritable sort of person who— Not that she was to be blamed altogether, in my judgment, for she had been provoked to it by a page boy belonging to the King of the Forest, and I am personally not surprised that this young

rogue was in consequence spirited away in the middle of the night, no one knew whither.

Another boy (quite a different sort) named Bilbo, son of one Bodad a woodchopper, managed to disenchant the forest and destroy the witch, and for this he was given, when he was old enough, the hand of the King's daughter, the Princess Dorobel; and in course of time there came to them a little son, by name Bojohn.

This Bojohn, with his friend Bodkin, a fisherman's boy, afterward discovered the lost page boy in a chamber beneath a forest pool, where the witch had placed him for his punishment; and in this chamber, with the page boy, was a company of enchanted men, also placed there by the witch, at various times, each for some offense against her, and each sitting there upright in a kind of cupboard in the wall, unable to speak or move. These men, and the page boy too, Prince Bojohn and his friend Bodkin set free, by means of a magical silver lamp.

In the audience room of the King's dwelling, a noble castle in the midst of the forest, the entire court assembled to welcome the rescued men on the night of their arrival; and the King, after making a speech (which no power on earth could have prevented his doing), created the rescued men, without bothering to ask whether they wanted it or no, an order of knighthood, to be known as the Order of the Silver Lamp. This done, he addressed the new knights,—but here I may as well turn back to the book itself, which thus relates what then occurred:

"We are all anxious," said the King, "to hear your



stories; they are, I am sure, of the greatest interest. You, sir," he said, addressing the oldest of the Knights of the Silver Lamp, who wore a faded spangled coat, of a period no one present could remember, "I beseech you to recount to us the story of your life, and in particular the adventure which brought you to so strange a pass."

"Willingly, sire," said the ancient man, so readily that it was apparent he had been waiting for this opportunity; and thereupon, with a considerable rustling and a good deal of whispering and nodding of heads, the assemblage composed itself to hear the story of the Old Man in the Spangled Coat.





Bojohn and Bodkin

*The Teller of Tales*

SOLARIO THE TAILOR

---

*His Audience*

PRINCE BOJOHN, *a boy, the King's grandson*

BODKIN, *a fisherman's boy, his friend*

THE PRINCESS DOROBEL, *Bojohn's mother*

PRINCE BILBO, *her husband, Bojohn's father*

THE KING and QUEEN *of the Great Forest, Bojohn's grandfather  
and grandmother, and the Princess Dorobel's parents*

MORTIMER the EXECUTIONER

THE ENCOURAGER of the INTERRUPTER







## THE FIRST NIGHT

### STORY OF THE OLD MAN IN THE SPANGLED COAT

**Y**OU must know (began the old man) that I am a tailor, by name Solario. In the reign of the good King Fortmain the Ninth—

*"Ah!" interrupted the King. "That was my great-grandfather. Bless my soul, master tailor, you must have been imprisoned under the forest pool nearly a hundred years ago. Hum! I dare say you know what you're talking about, but—"*

*"My dear," said the Queen, "I'm quite sure that the ninth Fortmain was your great-great-grandfather, and not your great-grandfather, though of course I may be mistaken; but it seems to me that it was the tenth Fortmain who was your great-grandfather, because the ninth had an oldest son who married into the Stiffish family, if I recollect the name correctly, or perhaps it was Standish, and at any rate he died without any children while his father was alive, and the younger son came into the—"*

*"Never mind, never mind," said the King. "You mustn't interrupt. Let the man go on with his story."*

You must know (began the old man again) that in the reign of the good King Fortmain the Ninth, I practised my art as a tailor in the city of Vernicroft, a thriving and busy city, located in a corner of the Great Forest remote from—

*"Vernicroft!" said the King. "I don't understand it. There's no such busy city now. There's nothing but a little ruined hamlet away over at the other side of the—"*

*"Well," said the Queen, "perhaps at that time—"*

*"Don't interrupt," said the King. "Let the man go on."*

You must know (began the old man again) that I had risen to a considerable eminence in my profession. I do not pretend to say that I was the very best tailor in the kingdom, for I am far too modest to speak of my own merit; but the—er—the spangled coat in which you now see me was a creation of my own brain, and at the time it was thought to be—er—however, it speaks for itself.



*"I think it's a perfect sight," whispered Bojohn to Bodkin.*

It is true I was growing old, but I was very well satisfied; there was no one dependent on me, my clients were numerous and rich, and I enjoyed the respect due an artist and man of substance. I had saved a good deal of money, for I had never squandered any in foolish gifts, nor wasted any in ridiculous pleasures, nor—but I do not wish to boast.

*"That's a wonderful thing to brag about," whispered Bodkin to Bojohn.*

One morning, a balmy morning in spring, I was sitting cross-legged on my worktable at the rear of my shop, busily plying the needle, when a stranger, richly dressed, entered my open door from the street, and approached me, bowing courteously. He was a handsome man, wearing a short beard; and I remarked with surprise, by contrast with his beard, that he was utterly without eyebrows.

"Sir," said he, "have I the pleasure of addressing the renowned Solario, whose genius has caused our city to be envied wherever art is prized?"

I confessed that I was the person.

"My master," he went on, "is a nobleman, to whose ears the rumor of your skill and taste has penetrated, although he lives in retirement and hears not much of the outer world. I trust that you are at liberty to undertake a piece of work for him?"

I assured him that I was.

"My master," he proceeded, "is, I must warn you, un-

able to satisfy himself, in the matter now in hand, with less than absolute perfection. Already he has been disappointed in some eight other tailors, and he has learned of your superlative excellence with much hope; and in order that he may assure himself how well his report of you is justified, he has commanded me to entrust to you a small commission; to wit, to sew on this button."

I was greatly mortified at this lame conclusion of so promising a speech; I suspected that the stranger was making game of me; but his manner was so respectful that I held my peace, and watched him without a word while he took from under his short blue velvet cloak a package, and depositing it before me on my table proceeded to undo it.

*"This old fellow talks like he was writing a composition," whispered Bodkin to Bojohn.*

*"Oh, he's a conceited pumpkin," whispered Bojohn. "He loves to hear himself talk, and I bet you he's thinking we're thinking we never heard such fine language in our lives. That's him, all over."*

### *The Doublet with the Missing Button*

The package contained a doublet, of a material I had never seen before, very thin and glossy, of a texture like that of wasp's nest but very tough. The doublet contained ten buttonholes, but only nine buttons; one button, and one only, was missing.

"I have here," said my visitor coolly, "the missing button; and my master will be obliged if you will sew it on."



Solario was sitting on his worktable busily plying the needle





He produced the button, a large ivory one, which, with the garment, he held up before me in his left hand.

"Please to hold out your left hand," said he.

I did so, and with his own left hand he placed the garment and the button in mine.

"This doublet," said he, "must not pass from one to another but by the left hand. Please to remember that. And now, adieu. I will return to-morrow. Meantime—"

He laid on my table a small purse, and bowing with sober courtesy he left the shop.

I turned up the purse, and a number of gold coins fell out, enough to pay for sewing on five hundred buttons. "Ah!" thought I. "At this rate I can well afford to gratify my new client's whimsies."

The next day the courteous stranger returned for the doublet. I delivered it with my left hand into his own left hand, the button being attached firmly in place. He thanked me, and departed; but on the morning after, he reappeared, to my surprise, and as he came in he smiled at me and shook his head at me waggishly.

"Fie! master Solario!" said he. "How could you have treated me so? And a mere button, too! Really, my good Solario!"

He produced the doublet, and showed me that it lacked a button in the same place as before. He held up in one hand the ivory button and in the other a length of thread. I was perplexed. The thread had not been cut, of that I was sure. It was the identical thread, and of the identical length.

"You will not blame my master," said the stranger, "if he finds himself a little aggrieved. He had scarcely put on the doublet yesterday when the button came off in his hand. I was commanded to leave it with you once more, together with this trifling honorarium."

So saying, he dropped a little purse on my table as before, and after putting the garment and its button into my left hand with his own left hand, bowed himself out. I turned up the purse in haste, and poured out a number of gold coins, as before, but this time twice as many. I put away the gold into my coffer, and sewed on the button once more, with special care.

I whipped the thread around itself under the button, sewed it through the goods, doubled it back through the button, wound it and knotted it and doubled it back, and altogether made such a job of it (however painful to me as an artist) as was perfect for security.

*"I don't see," interrupted the King, "what all this business about a button has got to do with—"*

*"If your majesty will pardon me," said the old tailor, "I have not yet reached the end of my story."*

*"I'm well aware of it," said the King. "But still I don't see—"*

*"My dear!" said the Queen, sweetly, and the old man went on with his story.*

Next morning the stranger returned for the doublet. I delivered it into his left hand with my left, and he turned to go. At the door he looked back at me smiling, and was about to bow himself out when he paused to try the



button with his fingers. A slight frown came over his face; he pulled the button gently, and behold, there before my eyes,—I assure you I saw it with these very eyes,—the button came off into his hand!

He sighed, looked at me gravely, and held out the button in one hand and the doublet in the other.

"Alas, good master Solario!" said he. "You have not treated me very well. The hopes I entertained for your profit are at an end. It remains only for me to apologize for my intrusion, and for you to return to me the money which I left with you."

This was too much. The idea of returning money which had once been locked safely in my coffer was more than I could bear. I sprang down from my table. "One moment!" I cried. "I beg of you! That I should not be able to sew on a miserable button—it is too ridiculous! Let me see your master myself, and prove to him what I can do! Take me to him at once! Let him assign me any task whatever, and I swear to you—"

"You wish to see my master?" said the stranger.

"At once!" I cried. "Do not carry back to him a report of me so unjust! I must see him myself!"

"Be careful what you say," said the stranger. "You may be sorry."

"Impossible!" said I. "Take me to him at once!"

The stranger looked at me thoughtfully. "If I take you," said he, "swear that you will never blame me for what may happen."

"I swear it!" I cried.

"You will remember that I warned you?"

"On my own head be it! Let us go at once!"

"Very well, then. The decision is yours, not mine; remember that. I will return for you to-night, and you will then, if you are still of the same mind, be ready to accompany me to my master."

He tucked the doublet with its button under his cloak, and in another moment he was gone.

That night, after dark, as I was putting up my shutters, a splendid coach and pair, driven by a black man in a rich but somber livery, stopped at my door, and the smiling stranger descended. I ran into the shop and put on my best attire. Some time before, I had designed and executed the coat in which you now see me; it had been much admired; I put it on, and hastened out to the stranger, who bowed me politely into the carriage.

During our journey, my companion exerted himself to be agreeable; and I, on my part, fairly unloosed the rein of conversation,—an art in which, I confess, I had always taken the greatest pleasure. On this occasion I surpassed myself; I drew upon the mysteries of our noble craft for his entertainment; I was by turns humorous and grave; I was at my best; it would not be too much to say that I sparkled; and in short, when the carriage stopped, I realized that I had taken no note of our route.

We drew up in a street which was unfamiliar to me. As we alighted, I observed before me a high wall, extending in either direction as far as I could see; and immediately at hand a little door in the wall, toward which

my companion led me. He pulled a bell-rope, and we were at once admitted by a second black man, in the livery I had already seen. I was aware, in spite of the darkness, that we were in a garden, or rather park, of immense dimensions.

*The Dark Mansion in the Walled Park*

I could see the dark outline of what appeared to be a great mansion. There were no lights anywhere. The air was heavy with the perfume of flowers, a cloying perfume, oppressively sweet. We came, after a considerable walk, to the house. At my companion's knock, a door was opened by a servant, black like the other two.

We entered a narrow hall, and at the end of this hall we reached a door, which was opened by a fourth manservant, black like the others; and after ascending a flight of stairs, and traversing several spacious apartments, we came to a pause in a small but elegant room, where my companion left me.

In a moment he returned, and beckoned me to come with him. He opened a door, gently pushed me through, closed the door behind me, and left me, as he advanced, blinking under the light of a hundred candles in a room more superb than any I had ever seen. The colored tiles of the floor, the thick rugs, the curious vases, the pictured tapestries on the walls,—I took them all in at a glance; and I was aware at the same time of an aroma like that of the flowers in the garden, but very faint.



*The Tailor Meets the Tall Black Man and His Fair Daughter*

At one end of the apartment was a table, loaded with fruit and flowers and wine. At the other end, on a divan, sat a tall and majestic man, dressed in the most exquisite taste. His skin was ebony black. He wore drooping black mustaches, and his hair was long and black; but I observed that he was, like the Courteous Stranger, totally without eyebrows.

At his feet, on a cushion, sat a lady, young and beautiful, a lady divinely beautiful, more beautiful than any I had ever seen or dreamed of. Her complexion! it was all cream and roses. Her eyes! they were blue of the blueness of violets, and they were merry and soft together. Her hair!—I swear I can see her at this moment. Her hair was of the— But I must not allow myself to think of her. The black man and the wonderful lady rose, and my companion presented me.

“You are welcome, Solario,” said the tall black man, smiling graciously. “You have wished to see me, as I hear, and to give me proof of your skill. But we can converse better while we refresh ourselves. You observe that the table is set for four. My daughter has, as you see, already counted upon your company. I hope you will consent to accept our poor hospitality.”

We seated ourselves at the table. My host clapped his hands four times, and four serving men entered, bearing the first course. They were black, like the four I had al-

ready seen. They were without eyebrows, and I seemed to remember the same defect in the other four. Eight men servants, all black, and all without eyebrows! I was puzzled; and when I looked from the fair face of the lady opposite me to the black face of her father, I was completely mystified. As for my stranger, he scarcely took his eyes from the damsel; and from the manner in which she now and then returned his gaze, I could see that they were on a footing of tenderness.

When we were at the end of our repast, and were trifling with our grapes and wine, my black host addressed himself directly to me. I was in a mellow mood; I felt that I could scarcely have denied him anything; and as for his daughter, if she had bade me run for her sake to the ends of the— Well, the wine was excellent; I sniffed in it the same aroma I had noticed twice before; and I was in consequence of it in that state of peace which in other circumstances would have preceded slumber. My host leaned toward me in the friendliest attitude.

### *The Black Prince Tells His Story*

"My dear Solario," said he, "you are asking yourself, all this while, who I am. I am a Prince, heir to the throne of the distant kingdom of Wen. My skin was formerly white, like my daughter's. It was changed, as you see it now, by the power of an enemy, and I am awaiting here, in exile, with my daughter and my friend, the release which day and night I dream of. If you are not too weary, I

will relate to you the adventure which brought me here and changed my skin."

"With all my heart," said I; whereupon, without further preamble, he commenced

#### THE STORY OF THE BLACK PRINCE

"Know, most excellent Solario," he began, "that my father the King of Wen called me to him one day, and sitting down with me addressed me as follows. 'My son,' said he—"

*"Is it a long story?" asked the King, yawning behind his hand.*

*"It is very interesting," said the old tailor.*

*"Not what I asked," said the King. "Is it long?"*

*"Well,—well—" said the old man.*

*"Then we will hear it another time," said the King.*

*"Pray let us hear what happened to you."*

*The old man bowed, quite crestfallen, and proceeded with his story.*

*"Oh, shucks," said Bojohn to Bodkin.*

When the Black Prince had concluded his own tale, he paused, and then said to me:

"Now, Solario, as to those circumstances of my misfortune which precede the tale I have just told you, I will, if you consent, call on my good friend here, who was personally concerned in them, to relate them to you."

Whereupon he nodded to my companion, who at once commenced



## THE STORY OF THE COURTEOUS STRANGER

"You must know," he began, "that soon after my arrival at the city of—"

*"What has this got to do with your being enchanted by the witch?" said the King.*

*"Well," said Solario, "its bearing on what afterward happened to me is perhaps a little indirect, but I assure your majesty that—"*

*"No, no," said the King. "I never sit up late, and it's getting on toward my bedtime."*

*The old man sighed.*

When the Courteous Stranger had finished his story, the Black Prince gazed at me for a moment.

"Solario," said he, "I will tell you the conclusion of the whole matter in a word. To him who shall deliver me from this spell, I will give five hundred thousand pieces of gold, of the money of your country. And, Solario," he said, bending toward me and pointing at me with his finger, "I believe you are the man."

Visions of Solario the tailor as the richest man in Vernicroft flashed before my eyes, and left me dizzy.

"It is a matter of sewing on a button," said the Prince. "I am allowed nine tailors for the trial, on the principle that nine tailors are the equivalent of one—ahem! I beg your pardon. Eight tailors have already essayed it, and failed. You are the ninth."

"And what has become of the other eight?" I asked, with some misgiving.

The Black Prince smiled. "You have already seen them," said he.

"I?" I exclaimed in amazement.

*Eight Tailors Who Could not Sew on a Single Button*

"Four of them served our table here to-night, and the other four you have met between your shop and this room."

"The eight black servants?" I cried.

"Precisely," said the Prince. "I must tell you, that he who fails comes himself under the spell, his skin changes to black, and he remains here with me in my retirement. If you deliver me, you deliver also these other eight. If you fail, you condemn yourself and all of us to everlasting misery. You are our final hope. What do you say?"

I was becoming almost lightheaded with the prospect of my reward. Perhaps the wine had something to do with it; perhaps it was the Prince's daughter, who smiled upon me bewitchingly.

"You have already seen my doublet," said the Prince. "So long as it remained intact, no harm could touch me. But my enemy, as I have related to you, succeeded in detaching from it a single button, and taking away the thread. Instantly all its virtue was gone; I was helpless. To this mischance I owe all my misery; my happiness hangs on a button. Take the doublet, Solario, and find the thread which will withstand sorcery. Three months are allowed you. Here are the doublet and the button; guard them as you would your life; and may you return to receive my thanks and the fortune which awaits you."

With his left hand he placed the doublet and the button in my left hand. The perfume of the wine seemed to grow heavier; I was very drowsy; I tried to speak; I could not arouse myself; I was conscious of the eager smile of the Prince's daughter, and I knew no more.

When I came to myself, I was in my bed behind the shop, and it was morning. My first thought was that I had had an unusual dream, but there on the pillow beside me lay the identical doublet and button, and I found myself wearing the spangled coat of the evening before. I jumped up and prepared my breakfast, but I could not eat. A desperate case I had gotten myself into, indeed! Where on earth should I obtain a thread which would withstand sorcery? And if I should fail—! I pushed aside my food and buried my face in my hands.

I heard the bell over my shop door tinkle, as if some customer were coming in. I paid no attention. Why had I allowed this hopeless enterprise to be thrust upon me? I was lost.

### *The Tailor Is Visited by a Hideous Old Woman*

I heard a cackle of unpleasant laughter. I looked up quickly and saw, sitting at the opposite side of my table, a little old woman, extremely hideous of face, hook-nosed, toothless, and wrinkled, munching her gums and watching me with little, malicious eyes.

The ancient hag did not leave me long in doubt about her business.



"Master tailor," said she, "the fortune is yours if you will have it."

Her voice was like nothing so much as the crackling of dry wood in a brisk fire.

"Never mind what I know nor how I know it," she went on, answering my thought before I spoke. "What would you give to know where and how to obtain the thread which will hold the button?"

"Anything!" I cried. "That is, almost anything."

"Would you marry?"

I thought of the adorable young lady whom I had seen the night before.

"Willingly!" I said. "That is,—yes, I think—"

"Then I will tell you the condition on which you may have the thread. You must marry me."

I looked at the frightful old creature; then I laughed and laughed; I could not help it. She arose in a great fury, grasped the crooked stick which she bore with her, and hobbled toward the door.

"You shall never find it!" she said. "No, never! You shall be a black and penniless outcast! You shall wish you had never been born! You are lost, lost, lost!"

That terrible prospect sobered me. If this woman could by any chance save me from such a fate, what price would be too great?"

"Come back," I said, "I will think it over."

"Speak!" said she. "Will you, or will you not?"

I looked at her. She was very old. She could not live long, at best. She might not live until the wedding day.

And if she should, a man of my wealth and power could afterward find the means of mitigating the horrors of such a marriage.

"How do I know you can perform your promise?" I asked.

"You need not perform yours until I have performed mine. Come, master tailor, will you or will you not?"

"I will," said I. "On the day when I receive my fortune from the Prince, I will marry you. Merciful powers!"

"Good," said she. "Now listen to me. The thread which will hold the button is the single black hair in the tail of the white unicorn, Alb, who feeds in the half-moon pasture of Korbi, by the river Tarn. Listen carefully while I tell you what you must do."

She then gave me the most minute directions; and when she had finished, she arose and hobbled to the door.

"Stop!" I said. "Tell me who you are, and where you live, and when I shall see you again."

She answered never a word; she was gone.

### *The Jolly Mule Driver and His Sing-Song*

I wrote down all I could remember of her instructions, and went out into the street to cool my burning head. As I stood before the door, I heard a jingling of little bells, and a voice singing and shouting, and saw, coming toward me down the street, a train of five or six mules, driven by a short fellow in a leather jerkin, on foot, who was singing raucously and shouting lustily to his animals. His

face was gay and humorous, and he cracked his whip merrily.

"Good mules for hire!" he sang. "Good mules for hire! We'll bring you to your heart's desire! We laugh at rain and snow and mire! We never lag and never tire! We *thread* our way through ice and fire! Good mules for hire! Good mules for hire!"

"Thread!" What did he mean by that word? I stared at him, and as he was passing me he looked at me long and hard, and gave me a slow wink.

A little while later, as I was ironing a piece of goods within doors, the mule driver himself appeared in the shop.

"At your service, master Solario!" he cried, gayly. "For a long journey or a short one! If you're thinking of going a journey, I'm your man! Come, master Solario, the sun is shining, lock up the shop!"

It seemed a curious piece of good fortune that this fellow should have appeared almost on the heels of the old woman herself, and the long and short of it was that I hired him for my journey, at so much per week. He agreed to provide the necessary outfit, and we would depart that night.

My preparations were soon made. The notes I had made of the old woman's directions I sewed inside my vest. I placed in my strong box the doublet and the button, and bestowed the box where it could not be found during my absence. At midnight, my driver appeared. It was a starry night. I locked the shop, and we mounted our mules. Preceded by four other animals, packed with our



outfit, we quietly moved down the street, past the last houses, and into the forest. My search for the white unicorn had begun.

*Adventures in Search of Alb the Unicorn*

From that night until we came in sight of the river Tarn, far beyond the confines of the Forest Kingdom, the adventures we encountered were numerous and fearful. We spent weeks on this perilous journey. In the second week we came to a dark castle on the side of a mountain. We crossed the drawbridge, which strangely happened to be down, though it was late at night, and blew the horn which hung by the gate. But perhaps it will be unnecessary to detail these adventures?

*"Totally unnecessary," said the King. "I can scarcely restrain my impatience to know how the story ends."*

There are several, however, of extraordinary interest, which you might perhaps be pleased to hear: the adventure of the Roving Griffin, the adventure of the Blind Giant, the adventure of Montesango's Cave—

*"Yes, yes," said Bojohn and Bodkin, in a loud whisper.*

*"No," said the King. "I must beg you to reserve these pleasures for another occasion. I can't sit up all night."*

We reached at last, on a sunshiny morning, the top of a little hill, from which we looked down on a narrow and shallow river, curved at this point outward in a crescent, and beyond it we saw a meadow of some two miles in depth, bounded at the rear by a high cliff, curved also outward

like a crescent, and reaching the river at the right hand and the left of the meadow. The meadow thus enclosed resembled in shape a half-moon.

"Ah!" I cried. "The river Tarn and the half-moon pasture of Korbi!"

I left my mule driver, and descended alone to the river. I found a ford, and though the water reached my shoulders, I had no difficulty in wading to the other side. I came there upon the pasture I had seen from the hill. It was green with tall grass, and sprinkled with flowers. I looked about fearfully, but the unicorn was not in sight. Creeping cautiously, I made toward the high cliff at the further side of the meadow. Just before I reached it, I stopped to consult my notes:

"A circle of white stones on the side of the cliff, higher than a man's reach. In the center of the circle, a blood-red flower growing on a long stem."

### *Solario Encounters Alb the Unicorn*

I walked along at the foot of the cliff, and after some ten minutes descried above me the circle of white stones. The wall was perfectly upright, but its surface was rugged enough to give promise of a foothold. I turned my head, and at that instant saw, a short distance away, farther down the line of the cliff, standing knee-deep in the grass and flowers, a small horse, pure white, with a pure white mane and tail, and a sharp-pointed horn in the middle of his forehead.



The unicorn stamped and gave a piercing neigh





As he saw me, he stamped his hoof and threw his head high. I started for the cliff; he made for the same point, as if to intercept me. I knew that against that sharp horn I should be helpless; it was now a matter of life and death. I ran with all my might; the unicorn came on at a gallop; we approached the foot of the cliff together; his head was down, and I could already in imagination feel his horn in my side; I doubled my exertions; I reached the cliff, and leaped up on the rocks just out of his reach, as he swept by me; I was safe.

I clung to my perch panting, and then painfully climbed to the circle of white stones. There, in its center, was the blood-red flower. The unicorn was standing below, watching me. When he saw me bend toward the flower, he stamped, shook his mane, and gave a long piercing neigh, as a horse will when he is in pain. I plucked the flower at the root. The unicorn's excitement was extraordinary. He pranced and bounded, shrieking in a manner almost human. I shivered at the thought of going down to him, but it had to be done. I descended carefully, holding the flower out in the unicorn's view. His shrieks subsided into a moaning cry. He shook his head up and down, as if under some strong command. I reached the ground.

I paused there for a moment, for I confess I was desperately afraid. Little by little I advanced to him, holding out the flower. He pranced and whined. I came within arm's length of his head, and held the flower before his mouth. With a quiver which shook his whole body, he seized it in his teeth. I quickly ran to his tail,

and searched there for the single black hair, keeping well away from his heels. Covered by the brush of white hair I found it. I seized it and gave it a mighty jerk. Out it came into my hand.

The unicorn trembled and tottered; and there in his place before my eyes stood a handsome young man, clad in a suit of soft and exquisite white leather. He fell on his knees before me and kissed my hand.

"Thanks, brave deliverer!" he cried. "The enchantment is broken! I am myself again! How glorious to be free!"

I raised him from the ground, and led him to a convenient place, where we sat down and conversed. I placed the precious black hair securely in the lining of my vest. If I on my part was overjoyed, the young man was positively beside himself. He laughed and cried by turns. I was of course intensely curious as to the circumstances of his enchantment. He willingly consented to relate them to me, and as soon as he had composed himself a little he began

#### THE STORY OF THE WHITE UNICORN

"I was born," said the young man, "in the Island Kingdom, far out in the Great Sea, the only son of a rich—"

*"Never mind, never mind," interrupted the King; "not now, some other time. It's my bedtime. Get on with your own story. We've no time now to listen to—"*

*"My dear," said the Queen, sweetly, "perhaps if you'd—"*



*"Some other time," said the King. "Not now, not now."*

*"Oh, botheration," said Bojohn to Bodkin. "He won't let us hear anything."*

*"I think it's too bad," said Bodkin to Bojohn.*

*The old man in the spangled coat sighed profoundly.*

When the young man had finished his tale, the day was far advanced. I wished to take him back with me to Vernicroft, but he was anxious to return to the Island Kingdom without losing a moment; we crossed the river together, and parted. I have never seen him since.

We made good speed homeward; all our difficulties seemed to have vanished. At first, I was saddened by the thought of my approaching marriage to the hideous and hateful old hag; but a new thought began to take possession of me, and grew stronger as we rode along from day to day, and my heart soon became lighter. Master as I was of such a key to power as lay secure within my vest, I could marry whom I chose. Why should I marry the ugliest creature I had ever seen, when the most beautiful might be mine for the asking? The more I thought of it, the more indignant I became at the manner in which my easy good nature had been imposed on at every hand; I had been grossly overreached; the bargain was beyond measure unconscionable; the exquisite face of the Prince's daughter haunted me day and night— And in short, when we arrived at Vernicroft, my mind was made up; I would *not* marry the old woman, and I would exact from the Prince a reward far more suitable than the one he had promised.

It was just on the stroke of midnight when we reached my shop. I left my driver on the sill, and procuring the necessary gold within, paid him off and dismissed him. He was a merry fellow, and had served me well, though I must say that I had never learned to like his way of cooking beans. He bade me a gay farewell, and as I turned back into the shop I looked over my shoulder, expecting to see him with his mules on his way down the street. To my astonishment, there was positively nothing in sight; the street was empty; in that moment the driver and his animals had vanished.

I entered the shop. The journey had cost me all the savings of my lifetime. But what did it matter? I was about to become rich beyond all my dreams. I lit my lamp and looked about me. There, beside my tailor's bench, sat the old woman herself. Her hands rested on the head of her crooked stick, and her toothless jaws were working.

"Well," she said, "you have it?"

"Yes," said I, "I have it."

"Good," said she. "The Prince's friend has been here many times. He will come to-morrow. I will return to claim you afterward. Good."

She rose, leaned on her stick, and nodding her head and grinning to herself hobbled out of the shop. My resolution to save myself from this outrageous creature became absolutely fixed.

*The Button Is Sewed on with the Unicorn's Hair*

I drew out the black hair of the unicorn's tail, and gave myself up to the pleasant task of sewing on the button. It was soon done, and it was well done. Nothing could be more secure. I placed the doublet under my pillow and went to bed.

In the morning I arose with a light heart. In order that the doublet might be near me, I put it on; and during the day three accidents proved its quality. First, a hot iron with which I was pressing my spangled coat slipped from my right hand and came down squarely on my left, and I felt no pain whatever. Next, a needle pricked my finger, and I was aware of no inconvenience. And last, as I was standing in the doorway, some wicked boys, with whom I was never a favorite, hurled a stone at me, striking me violently on the temple; but its effect was no more than that of a soft cushion. Undoubtedly the unicorn's hair was the authentic thread.

At nightfall, after I had put up my shutters, I stored the doublet secretly away, and was making ready to go to bed, when a knock sounded at the door, and I admitted the Prince's friend, smiling and gracious as before. He looked inquiringly at me. I bowed and smiled.

"Yes," I said, "the work is done."

"The thread?" he cried.

"I have it, never fear! The work is done."

He was in a state of great excitement.



"Come!" he cried. "The carriage is at the door. Bring it with you. Hurry!"

In a moment I was in his carriage, with a bundle under my arm. We stopped at the same place as before, and reached by the same route the room where I had first seen the Prince and his daughter. They arose in agitation as I came in, and at a joyful signal from my companion came forward and grasped my hands. Truly the lady was more beautiful than I had dreamed.

"You have succeeded?" said the Prince.

"I have!" said I. "Your deliverance is assured!" And I described the accidents from which the doublet had protected me that day.

"Let us sit down," said the Prince; and when we were all seated, with fruit and wine before us, he begged me to tell my story.

I told as much as I thought fit, omitting any mention of the old woman. The Prince desired to see the doublet. With my left hand I placed in his left the package I had brought with me. He opened it and held up the contents. Alas, it was not the doublet at all, but some indifferent garment intended for another client!

He looked at me in amazement. I was covered with confusion, and begged him to overlook my carelessness. He listened coldly.

"You will bring the doublet here to-morrow," he said sternly.

"That is understood," I said. "Meanwhile," I went

on, fortifying myself with another glass of the perfumed wine, "we may as well discuss the question of my reward."

"That," said the Prince, "is already settled."

"The case is altered," I said. "If I had known what lay before me, I could have made more fitting terms; but I was in the dark; the dangers and exertions of my existence since then have changed the case completely. I am sure that you do not wish to deal with me unjustly. Think what my service means to you! In your place, I should think nothing too precious for my deliverer."

A dark frown came over the Prince's face.

"What is it you demand?" said he.

### *The Prince Receives the Tailor's Terms*

"I demand nothing," said I. "But if you wish to have the doublet and be restored to yourself, your country, and your people, I shall ask only three things: one million pieces of gold, this house, and your daughter's hand in marriage."

All three jumped to their feet. I sat calmly. At a look from the Prince, his daughter and the Courteous Stranger sat down again. They were both very pale.

"These are your terms?" said the Prince. "You are resolved on this?"

"Inflexibly," I said.

"Then we must consider," said he. "When you bring the doublet to-morrow you shall have my answer. For the present, let us dismiss the subject."

His command of himself was superb. He began to talk

lightly on indifferent subjects, and as he talked his voice became gradually more distant, and I grew drowsy; I knew I was falling asleep. I remember nothing more until I awoke the next morning in my own bed.

To my surprise, the old woman did not appear at all on that day. On the whole, the time passed pleasantly. I had no doubt the Prince would accept my terms. I reveled in the happiness which was so soon to be mine.

At night, dressed in my spangled coat, and with a bundle under my arm, I sat in the shop waiting for my stranger. I was too wise to take with me the true doublet, and you may be sure the bundle contained a substitute. It would be time enough to deliver the magic garment at the wedding. It reposed meanwhile under lock and key, concealed beyond the possibility of discovery.

It was late when the stranger appeared. He conducted me to the Prince and his daughter in chilly silence. The Prince was standing, and his daughter sat on the divan, her chin in her hand.

"You have brought the doublet?" said the Prince.

"First," I said, "do you accept the terms?"

"I must see the doublet," he said.

With my left hand I placed the bundle in his left hand. He opened it. When he saw its contents, he turned on me with a face like a thunder cloud.

"What!" said I. "Another accident? Well, it's of no consequence. The doublet is safe, perfectly safe. It will be placed in your hands—at the wedding. Do you consent?"



*The Magic Doublet Is Suddenly Produced*

He clapped his hands. A door opened behind the divan, and—I could scarcely believe my eyes—in hobbled, with her crooked stick, the old woman whom I had pledged myself to marry. I was speechless with astonishment. The Prince clapped his hands again. From other doors entered the eight black tailors whom I had seen before. The ancient hag approached the Prince, and drew forth from her dress the doublet which I had left securely locked and hidden at home! I saw it closely; it could be no other. With her left hand she laid it in the left hand of the Prince.

In an instant he had put it on. When he had buttoned the last button, a startling change came over him and the eight black tailors. All their faces grew a mottled blue, then red, and then the natural color of healthy white skin.

At the same time the room began to contract. The ceiling came slowly down and stopped just above my head. The walls came slowly together, and as they reached the Prince, his daughter, the Courteous Stranger, and the eight tailors, gave way to them, so that all these persons passed from view on the outer side, and I was left alone with the hideous old woman, with the walls coming in upon us by degrees until I thought we should be crushed.

I became dizzy; I sank in terror upon the chair which stood beside me. The walls came on from all four sides until the place wherein I sat was no bigger than a cupboard, and there they stopped.—I breathed a sigh of relief,

and attempted to rise. To my horror, I could not move.

The old woman pointed a skinny finger at me and gave a loud and angry laugh which sent a chill up and down my spine. She moved her finger about in strange figures. She mumbled to herself a torrent of meaningless words; and passing through the door which remained before me in one wall of my cabinet, she left me, and closed the door behind her. The closet began to rock; it seemed to rise, and in a moment I knew that it was flying with me through space. . . .

Thus, your majesty (said the old man in the spangled coat), I came to be imprisoned in my cell beneath the Forest Pool. There I sat, unable to move or speak, for nearly a hundred years, until the happy day when I was delivered by the excellent Prince, your grandson; and for the refuge which has been accorded me in your majesty's castle I now tender to your majesty my grateful thanks, and—

*"Eh? What? Did you say something?" exclaimed the King, waking up from a sound slumber, and rubbing his eyes. "Oh, yes. I see. Very interesting. Very interesting. Something about a button, wasn't it? Bless my soul, I'd no idea it was so late. It's long past my bedtime. I'm always late for breakfast when I stay up past my—Mortimer, will you see to it that the castle windows are locked for the night? My dear, I think we will have bacon and eggs in the morning; and if it's at all possible, I'd like to have a piece of toast that isn't burnt. The audience is now over."*



## THE SECOND NIGHT

### ALB THE UNICORN

**S**OLARIO the Tailor was sitting at the open window of his room in the northeast tower of the castle, looking out at the stars which glittered in a clear sky over the Great Forest. He sighed, and rising wearily lit the candles on his table; and at that moment there came a knock on his door, and Bojohn and Bodkin entered, rather timidly.

"If you please, sir—" said Bojohn.

"Pray be seated," said Solario, and they all sat down.

"It's a warm evening," said he.

"We thought," said Bojohn, "that you might perhaps be willing to tell us one of the stories that you—"



*"It's very warm this evening, indeed," said Solario. "Quite oppressive."*

*"If it wouldn't be too much trouble," said Bodkin, "we'd like you to tell us about—"*

*"I don't know when I've felt the heat so much," said the old tailor. "But then it's the idleness. If there were only something to do, there wouldn't be so much time to think about the weather."*

*"Last night, sir," said Bojohn, "you were obliged to leave out some parts of your story, and we thought—"*

*"If I only had a few good ells of cloth on my table, and a man like—well, say like Mortimer the Executioner,—to exercise my art on, I'd be the happiest man alive; but as it is, sitting here with nothing to do—"*

*"There was one tale you mentioned," said Bojohn, "about a—"*

*"It's a very fine thing to be a Knight of the Silver Lamp," said Solario, "but there doesn't seem to be much connected with it in the nature of work. If I could only be employed in making a suit of clothes for Mortimer the Executioner! There's a subject! The biggest man I've ever seen in my life, and the hardest to fit! That would be an undertaking worthy of my genius. Dear, dear!"*

*"I'll speak to grandfather about it," said Bojohn. "I'm sure he'll let you make a suit for Mortimer. But what we would like to know is—"*

*"We'd like to hear one of the stories," began Bodkin again, "that the King made you leave out last night when—"*

*"It made no difference to me, I assure you," said Solario, stiffly. "None whatever."*

*"But if you would only tell us—" said Bodkin.*

*"I do not wish to annoy any one with my dull tales," said Solario. "Far from it; far from it indeed, I assure you."*

*"But there was one," said Bojohn, "about a griffin; what kind of a griffin did you say it was?"*

*"I believe, if I remember correctly, it was a Roving Griffin; but his majesty your grandfather—"*

*"Oh, never mind grandfather," said Bojohn. "Tell us about the—"*

*"I'd rather hear the one about the giant," said Bodkin.*

*"You probably have reference to the Blind Giant," said Solario. "But—"*

*"Then there was one," said Bojohn, "about some cave or other."*

*"The Cave of Montesango," said Solario. "I remember it only too well. But I could n't tell you that; it would be too terrible. You would n't be able to sleep in your beds to-night."*

*"Then tell us that one!" cried the two boys, together.*

*"No," said Solario. "The King would never approve if I—"*

*"Grandfather isn't here now," said Bojohn. "Please—"*

*"Perhaps," said Solario, "I might tell you the story concerning the— But I fear it would bore you."*

*"No! no!" cried the boys.*

*"Then I might perhaps tell you the story of Alb the Unicorn, only—"*

*"Yes! yes! Tell us about the unicorn!"*

*"You are sure it will not weary you?"*

*"Not a bit!" said Bojohn.*

*"Would you mind, sir," said Bodkin, "leaving out the big words?"*

*"I shall willingly endeavor to gratify your reasonable predilection for lucidity," said Solario.*

*"Sir?" said Bodkin.*

*"Never mind," said Bojohn. "Let him go on."*

*"Ahem!" said the old man, clearing his throat. "I will give you as much of it as I can remember, as it was told me by the young man in the white leather suit while we were sitting in the half-moon pasture of Korbi by the river Tarn, after I had delivered him from his enchantment. You are sure it will not weary you?"*

*"Go on! Go on!"*

*"Then I will begin," said Solario, settling himself back at his ease, and folding his hands across his stomach,*

**"THE STORY OF ALB THE UNICORN."**

You must know (said the young man to me) that I am called Alb the Fortunate. I was born in the Island Kingdom, far out in the Great Sea, the only son of a rich goldsmith. I lived with my parents, by whom I was tenderly loved, in the principal city of that kingdom, in which city, on a height overlooking the island, stood the castle of the King.



*Alb the Fortunate and the Princess Hyla*

My father, whose skill in his art had caused him to be valued highly by the King, was a familiar figure at the castle, and I had there, in company with my mother, become acquainted with the young Princess Hyla, the King's only child, a beautiful and amiable girl some two years younger than myself. We were even permitted to play together in the gardens of the castle, for the King was in no wise proud, but on the contrary made a point of treating his subjects with a friendliness which endeared him to them all. I need hardly tell you that from the earliest moment I knew that I loved the little Princess.

I grew thus in time to be twelve years old. Although my parents had done for me all that love could devise and money could effect, I had caused them much uneasiness. My disposition was unnaturally gloomy; I scarcely ever smiled; my mind was filled with terrors, I knew not why; I would sit for hours in moody silence; the games of other boys did not amuse me; and I would find myself at times weeping bitterly, for no reason whatever.

All that my parents could do to divert me availed nothing; I continued to be a misery to myself and to them. They feared for my health; their wealth no longer gave them any pleasure; and an atmosphere of gloom settled down upon their house. Sometimes my mother would look mournfully into my eyes while she smoothed back the yellow hair from my forehead; and I knew that she would willingly have given all that she had to make me happy.

On my twelfth birthday it chanced that I was in my father's shop, alone. My mother had gone into the back room, and my father was absent, for the day, at the residence of a distant client. I had been trying all that morning to find some occupation to amuse me, but without success; I had finally given myself up to a restless and discontented idleness; and at the moment I was examining in my hand, without much interest, a long chain, of extremely fine gold and delicate workmanship, which I had picked up from one of the cabinets in the shop. I was in the act of placing it back in its case, wondering what I should do next, when a strange figure entered the door from the street, and approached me.

*A Tattered Old Beggar Comes to the Goldsmith's Shop*

It was an old man, evidently a beggar, a huge man, fat and heavy, his face covered by a gray beard which hung to his waist, and his eyes, which were very bright, almost hidden by shaggy eyebrows,—the longest eyebrows I had ever seen on any human being. A ragged tunic of brown, belted around the middle, hung scantily to his knees; a battered felt hat flapped over his forehead; and in his hand he carried, for a staff, what seemed to be a yardstick, such as tailors use. From his belt hung a pair of large shears, also of the sort used by tailors. A queer tailor! thought I.

"Good morning, master Melancholy," said he, "have you a mind for trade this morning?"

The idea of this poor creature's pretending to be a customer at such a shop as ours was too absurd. I could not restrain a little toss of the head.



"There is something here," said the old beggar, "which I wish to buy"





"So?" said the old man. "Is that what you think? Nevertheless, there is something here which I wish to buy." He looked around the shop. "I wish to buy a chain, a gold one; and I see none that pleases me so much as the one you are holding behind your back. Will you sell it?"

I was astonished that he should have discovered the chain, which I could have sworn was hidden from his eyes. I drew it forth and held it up.

"Be so good as to let me see it," said the old man; and at the same time he took it from me, before I could snatch it away.

"What may the price be, my young merchant?" said he.

I was trembling with anxiety, but I thought it best to end the whole matter by naming the price, which I found on the card which remained in the cabinet.

While I hesitated, the horrid creature gazed at me with his glittering eyes through his tangled eyebrows, and ran his fingers down his beard like a comb.

"The price," I said, "is four thousand gold florins. Now please give me back the chain."

"The price is high," said the old man, "but I will take it."

"Then give me the money," said I.

"Money?" said he, with an air of great surprise. "Money? But I have no money."

"Then how are you going to buy the chain?" said I. "Give it back to me."

"I will buy it, nevertheless," said he. "I will give you what is better than money."

"What is that?" said I, suspiciously.

"I will give you," said he, "whatever you would like best in the world."

"Then give me back the chain."

"Think!" said he. "What would you like best in all the world, for your very self?"

"Nothing," I said, ready to cry. "I want the chain back. If you don't give it to me," I said, angrily, "I will call my mother."

"With all the pleasure in the world," said the impudent old rascal.

I was now ready to cry in good earnest.

### *The Old Man Proposes a Strange Bargain*

"But I advise you to listen to me, my young friend," went on the dreadful creature. "You may make a wish, if you will; and if you don't, I will. If I keep the chain, you shall make the wish; if you keep the chain, I will make it; but I warn you, if I make the wish, I shall wish you harm! such harm that you would rather be dead than alive! Come now, will you sell me the chain for a wish?"

"I can't," I said, "I can't." And I began to cry.

"Then you would like to be crippled all your life? To find vipers in your bed every night? To see the Princess run away from the sight of you? To suffer a sharp pain in your ears, to have all your drink turn to——"

"No, no!" I cried. "Please don't, please don't!"

"Then you had better sell me the chain. What would you like best in the world?"



"Oh, I want to be happy! I want to be happy! I'm so miserable!"

"You really wish to be happy?"

"Oh, yes! If I could only be happy, always happy!"

"Think well. I can grant you that wish, if you really wish it."

"I wish I could be happy, always happy!"

"The wish is granted. You shall be happy; after this day you shall be nothing but happy, always. It is done. The chain is mine."

"Oh, please! If you will only wait one moment! Just one! I must call my mother!"

I ran to the door of the back room, and called my mother. She came at once, alarmed by my outcry. Together we turned back into the shop, toward the spot where I had left the old man. He was gone.

I dragged my mother to the shop door, and we looked up and down the street. There was no sign of him. I ran from one corner to the other. He was nowhere in sight. I returned to my mother and threw myself on her breast and wept.

"The chain!" I sobbed. "It is gone!"

While she tried to comfort me I told her the story. She wrung her hands. "What will your father say?"

That evening, when my father heard what had happened, he was very angry. He was a kind man, but he scolded me so severely that I crept up to bed weeping, without any supper. I had never been so miserable. I cried myself to sleep.

When I awoke in the morning, sunshine was streaming in through the window. I sprang out of bed. A fat sparrow was hopping on the window sill, and when he saw me he cocked his head at me in the jolliest manner possible. I whistled to him, and laughed after him as he flew away.

While I was dressing, and humming a tune the while, I suddenly remembered that I had gone to bed in tears for the loss of my father's golden chain; but I laughed as I thought of it, for the loss seemed pitifully small, and my father's anger over it was quite ridiculous. I went on with my tune, and stood before the mirror with a hairbrush in my hand. I began to brush my hair; and I cannot deny that as I looked at its yellow and somewhat curly abundance I thought of the Princess with complacency.

Now it happened that the most serious work of my life, on which I had then been engaged for more than six months, had been the training of my hair to lie in a flat sweep backward from my forehead. I had devoted much patient labor to this work; it required that I should wear on my head all day a tight skullcap, and I even suffered to the extent of wearing it in bed at night, when I could do so without my mother's knowledge. I now shook my hair from my forehead with a quick backward toss of the head, in a manner which always made my father look at me in alarm, and proceeded to brush it straight back with vigorous strokes of the brush.

*The Three Black Hairs in the Yellow Head*

I was in the act of applying a small quantity of dry soap, when I looked at my yellow head in the mirror a trifle more attentively. My gaze became fixed; and as I held my head close to the glass I was astonished to see there, among the yellow strands, three coarse black hairs, very distinct, one in the middle and one on either side.

They did not suit me very well, and I accordingly, with some trouble, plucked each of them out by the root.

Before leaving the room, I gave a final glance of satisfaction at myself in the mirror, and a final touch of the brush to my hair. I stopped suddenly, fixed with astonishment; the three long, coarse black hairs, which I had but a few moments before plucked away, lay there as before, one in the middle of my head and one on either side.

I could not understand it in the least, but after all, what did it matter? I could not allow myself to be bothered by such a trifle. I ran downstairs singing merrily.

At breakfast, I found myself prattling of a thousand things, and I was surprised to remark the confusion with which my parents received my sallies. In the midst of my talk, my mother whispered with sudden excitement into my father's ear; I did not hear what she said, but I saw his eyebrows rise and heard him blow out his lips in a long-drawn "O-oh!" as if a light had dawned on him. And after that they responded gayly to my chatter, and we had altogether the merriest meal we had ever had in our lives.

After breakfast I accompanied my father to the castle,



where I sought out the Princess Hyla, and found her weeping beside one of the fountains in the garden, because her ball had fallen into the water which filled the wide marble basin. I laughed at her, for she did seem comical enough. She stamped her foot angrily at me, but this only made me laugh the more. I jumped into the pool and brought back the ball. She looked at me as if in bewilderment, and cried, "What are you laughing at? Are you crazy?" Far from being offended, I laughed more merrily than before.

The King was much pleased with my little service to the Princess, and after our departure my father assured me that I had advanced markedly in the King's regard. Everything, in short, was going well.

From that day, my unfailing spirits rejoiced my parents more and more as time went by; their house rang with my merriment; my mother became more youthful in appearance; and as I grew older I became known throughout our city for the brightness of my face and the liveliness of my talk, and I was everywhere in demand. It is true that the three long black hairs continued in their places on my head, and my mother looked at them at times, as it seemed to me, with uneasiness; but I laughed at her; and although I sometimes plucked these hairs from my head, I did so only for the amusement of seeing them reappear in their places as before.

### *Alb Wins the Promise of the Princess's Hand*

When I was sixteen years of age, a circumstance befell which I was able to turn to good account. The Princess

Hyla one night unaccountably disappeared. The King was strangely disturbed by this incident, and though I could not quite understand the reason for so much perturbation, I resolved to rescue the Princess and restore her to her father's arms, if I could. This I was able to do, in the course of a very singular adventure, and in reward the King promised me her hand in marriage. I will now relate to you, if you wish it, the adventure by which I rescued the Princess from the strange fate which involved her; it is the adventure, as I may call it, of

#### THE RAGPICKER AND THE PRINCESS

It happened (said Alb the Fortunate) that the King, with his daughter, sojourned for a time at his castle of Ventamere, beside the Great Sea; and my father and myself, being lodged in the town hard by,—

*"On second thoughts," said Solario, interrupting himself, "I will not relate this tale just now. It is too long. It will be better to go on with—"*

*"But we'd like to hear it now," said Bojohn.*

*"No," said Solario, firmly, "it will be much better to tell it some other time."*

Thus (said Alb, when he had finished the story of his adventure), I restored the Princess, with the assistance of the One-Armed Sorcerer whom I have mentioned, and in gratitude the King took the One-Armed Sorcerer to dwell with him in his castle in our own city, and promised to me the hand of the Princess in marriage when I should come of age. Truly things were going well with me.

*A Trifling Incident Disturbs Alb's Mother*

Some two years later, when I was just past my eighteenth birthday, an incident occurred in our household which caused my mother much disturbance. My father died. He had left the house on horseback in the morning, for a journey to the country on a matter pertaining to his business. In the evening, after the shop was closed, a loud knock brought my mother and myself to the door in haste. A crowd was gathered at the entrance, and on a litter carried by two men lay my father's body; and in this manner he was borne into the shop. His horse had thrown him and his neck was broken.

My mother threw herself upon him and wailed. She tried to arouse him; she talked to him as if he were alive; she even went so far as to try to call him back to life. I was at first greatly astonished at her behavior, and then it struck me as being excessively ridiculous. To think of trying to call back the dead to life! It was highly amusing. I felt a tide of merriment rising within me. I laughed.

I have never seen on any human being's face the look of horror which my mother turned on me when she heard my laugh. She crouched away from me in fear. Her sobbing ceased, and her eyes remained fixed on me; they grew wider and wider; I began to wonder how long they could stare so without winking. I glanced at the others in the room, and was surprised to see that no one else even so much as smiled. It was useless to remain longer in a company so dead to the brighter things of life. I controlled my good



humor and composed my features, and patted my mother affectionately on the shoulder; but she recoiled from my touch; and without appearing to take her inconsiderate behavior in ill part in the least, I left the room.

*Unreasonable Conduct of the Goldsmith's Widow*

It astonished me afterward to observe that my mother met my customary gayety with coldness, for she had always seemed to take great pleasure in it. She grew very gloomy indeed. I could not discover any reason for it, but I did what I could to cheer her by my own liveliness. For some reason or other, my father's death appeared to have a depressing effect on her. I made my jokes and sang my songs as usual, but she reached such a state in a few months that she would scarcely speak to me, but on the contrary spent most of her time in her room, alone.

I noticed, in the course of time, a slight change in the manner of my customers and friends. The former transacted their business briefly, without an unnecessary word; and the latter appeared to avoid me, as if they scarcely wished to know me any longer. It was very amusing.

In less than a year after my father's death, my mother died. It was thought by some that my father's death had something to do with her decline, but how that could be I never could understand.

*The Merrymakers Are Suddenly Sobered*

The night of the day on which she died was the night fixed for a feast at the house of one of my friends. After

looking for a moment into the room where she lay, I dressed myself carefully for the occasion, and found myself thrilled with pleasant anticipation.

A large and merry company met at table at my friend's house; I talked in my best manner; and whatever coldness I might have observed before was dispelled in the general gayety. Toward the close of the banquet, I chanced to remark across the table that my mother had that day died. The effect of this remark was astonishing. As it passed from one to another, silence fell upon the company.

I wondered if I had made some blunder. I endeavored in vain to relieve the awkwardness of the moment by changing the subject and commencing a story with which I had never failed to provoke a laugh; but in this case it provoked not so much as a smile; I was absolutely perplexed. The party soon broke up in what appeared to be confusion, and I went home to enjoy in my own room the recollection of those lugubrious faces.

When I was twenty-one, I was married to the Princess, and thenceforth the castle was my home. I sold the business which my father had left me, and settled down to a life of unbounded bliss with my dear Hyla, whom as a wife I found even more adorable than I had dreamed.

I became the life of the castle. The faces of my new acquaintances always brightened in my company; I was the only one in that glittering society who never knew a dull or uneasy moment; my presence was like a ray of sunshine in the court.

I noticed after a while that the Princess, my wife, began

to respond to my constant gayety more carelessly; at times she would sit and look at me wonderingly, I knew not why.

One day she asked me to accompany her on a little excursion in the city. She did not tell me where she meant to go, but I asked nothing; it was enough to be with her. I could not conceal my surprise, however, when she stopped our carriage at the entrance to the city's poorest quarter; but I had no doubt she had planned some pleasant diversion, and I followed her, talking in my liveliest manner all the while. She herself was quite silent.

She led me from one hovel to another, for more than an hour. In one we saw a sick child lying on a pallet of straw on a dirt floor, and around him his mother and sisters and brothers, all weeping absurdly; I rallied the mother on it in the pleasantest way possible, but she did not take it in very good part. In another we found an old man, blind and alone, without food and without wife or child, talking to himself in a gibberish which was truly laughable; I tried, for sport, to talk to him in the same sort of gibberish, but though it was excellent sport, I saw that for some reason or other it did not amuse my wife, so I led her away. In another place we saw a man who was evidently overcome by wine, and who appeared to be in terror of certain vipers and spiders which, as I ascertained, existed nowhere but in his own imagination. This man was the prize of the whole collection; I amused myself with him for a long time; and I was altogether so greatly diverted that the Princess had some difficulty in dragging me away.

On the way home, I commented on what we had seen with



a drollery which I had thought sufficient to draw a smile from a stone; but the Princess was unmoved; she sat in stony silence, and when we reached the castle she went at once to her room, and I saw her no more that day.

Not long afterward, a beautiful boy was born to us; and in course of time he grew to be the finest child of his age in the Island Kingdom; there were many who said so, even to his mother.

He was two years of age, when on a certain day in summer his mother sent him into the gardens with a nurse, while she remained with me in conversation in her room. Some half hour later, I was telling her an amusing story, which I had recently heard, when the door burst open, and a manservant rushed into the room carrying our boy, dripping wet, in his arms, and laid him in his mother's lap. The child was dead. The nurse had left him beside the same fountain pool from which years before I had rescued his mother's ball, and in her absence he had fallen into the water. The Princess turned pale and screamed; she clasped the child to her breast and rocked him back and forth; she spoke to him as if he were still alive, and even tried to call him back to life.

I smiled at her delusion. I put my hand on her shoulder and shook her gently. She looked up at me with streaming eyes, and saw the bright and smiling look on my own face.

"Come, my dear," I said kindly, laughing quietly as I spoke, "there is no use talking to him like that, you know. You must be reasonable. The dear little fellow is dead, that is all. Surely there is nothing in that to disturb you? Look

at me. I'm not disturbed. I can't understand what you find in this to bother you. Come, let the good man take him away to another room, and I will go on with the story I was telling when we were interrupted."

She rose slowly, never taking her eyes from me, and hugging the child closer backed away from me, and suddenly turned and fled from the room. I smiled to myself at the whimsical nature of women.

It was a long time before she would speak to me; and although I did not permit this to ruffle me, I waited with some impatience for her explanation. I was of course reluctant to blame her too much without giving her an opportunity of explaining her conduct. I was accordingly pleased when she took me aside one day and asked to speak with me in private. She sat down before me in her room and looked me steadily in the eyes.

### *The Princess Finds Her Husband Bewitched*

"Alb," said she, "this can go on no longer. You are bewitched."

I smiled indulgently. "I am not aware of it," I said.

"Tell me," she said, earnestly, "what are those three black hairs in your head?"

"Oh, those! They are nothing. I found them there after the old beggar had pretended to grant me a wish, long ago."

"What old beggar? Now I am learning something! Tell me about the old beggar and the wish!"

"What does it matter? He was a ragged old fellow, with shaggy eyebrows, carrying a yardstick and tailor's shears, and I sold him a fine gold chain for a wish, and right angry my father was, too. But I was only twelve years old, you know."

"Why have you never told me this before? What was the wish?"

"The wish? Oh, I wished—I wished I might be perfectly happy, always;—always happy;—a pretty good wish, I think."

"A terrible wish! A frightful wish! Tell me—tell me—have you ever wept since you were twelve years old?"

"Of course not. How absurd. There has never been anything for me to weep about."

"That's it! That's it! That's the curse! You can't weep! You've got to be cured of happiness! Cured of happiness!"

This idea was so preposterous that I laughed loud and long; but while I was still laughing she took me by the hand and led me into a distant part of the castle, where I had never been before, until we came to the foot of a narrow, winding stair in a tall tower.

We climbed the stairs, and stopped at last, panting, on a little landing before a door. The Princess knocked, and without waiting for an answer opened the door and drew me in after her. We were in a small, circular room, evidently at the very top of the tower, from the windows of which I could see far across the city and beyond the distant mountains to the Great Sea.



*Alb and the Princess Visit the One-Armed Sorcerer*

In the center of this room was a spinning wheel, and before this spinning wheel was the One-Armed Sorcerer whom I had met in the adventure which had gained me the Princess for my wife; a spare old man, with bright blue eyes in a rosy face and long white hair and beard, and clothed in a blue gown spangled with silver stars. He rose, smiling at us kindly, and motioning us with his only hand (his left) to sit down; and when we were seated, the Princess told him the story of the old vagabond who had granted me a wish.

He nodded understandingly, and the Princess said: "We have come to you for help. Will you help him get rid of his curse?"

I laughed merrily. "I'm pretty well satisfied as I am," I said. "I don't wish to be cured of anything."

"And yet," said the One-Armed Sorcerer, "you ought to want to be cured. Your trouble is, that you can't weep. Let me tell you something. When people can weep, it's because there's some good in them. When they can't weep, it's because all the good in them is frozen up hard. Nobody can weep all the time, any more than anybody can be happy all the time, unless it's a bewitched creature like yourself. I'm not sure which would be worse, to weep all the time or to be happy all the time; but one thing I'm sure of, and that is that it's best for us all to have a little weeping and a little happiness, sometimes the one and sometimes the other, woven together in all shades of light

and dark; and if you want to come out in a beautiful pattern at last, there's no other way to do it. Laugh and weep; weep and laugh; that's the whole story, and a fine story it is too, and well worth having a part in."

"Oh!" cried the Princess, who was now weeping softly, "will you help him to have a part in it like the rest of us?"

"I'm very comfortable as I am," said I, smiling.

"Do you know," said the Princess, "how to cure him?"

"I can tell him how to cure himself," said the sorcerer.

"Then please tell us at once!" said the Princess.

"There is danger in it," said the sorcerer.

"Danger doesn't bother me," said I, beginning to take an interest.

"Good," said the sorcerer. "Then I will tell you. Have you ever heard of the half-moon pasture of Korbi, by the river Tarn?"

Neither of us had ever heard of it.

"It lies far beyond the Great Sea. Would you like to make a journey there?"

"That would be jolly!" I cried.

"The half-moon pasture of Korbi is the end of your journey, where you will get rid of the third black hair, and be cured."

"What?" I cried in astonishment.

"Yes, the third of the three black hairs in your head."

I had forgotten all about them. Certainly this was a knowing old sorcerer.

*The Old Man of Ice, the Laughing Nymph, and the  
Great Horned Owl*

"I will tell you," he went on, "what those three black hairs are. The one on the left side of your head is the Old Man of Ice, who lives in the Great Cave near the top of Thunder Mountain, in this very island. The one on the right side of your head is the Laughing Nymph who lives in the Three-Spire Rock on the farther shore of the Great Sea. The one in the middle of your head is the Great Horned Owl, whose feathers are scales so hard that no spear can pierce them, and who lives at the top of the cliff at the far side of the half-moon pasture of Korbi. You must not touch the Old Man of Ice. You must not laugh with the Laughing Nymph. And you must not speak when you see the Great Horned Owl."

"I don't like this very much," said the Princess.

"Nonsense, my dear," said I. "It sounds very exciting."

"Do you know what a burning glass is?" went on the sorcerer.

"Yes," said I.

He went to a chest beside the wall, and took from it a small, round, thick piece of glass, and placed it in my left hand.

"There is only one thing that can destroy the Old Man of Ice, and that is a hot beam from the sun. Before you go into his cave, hold this burning glass with your left hand up to the sun. The rays it catches will remain in it for seven minutes, and no longer; and if you can then



within those seven minutes, holding the glass in your left hand, fix those rays on the Old Man of Ice, he will be destroyed, and you will get rid of the black hair on the left side of your head."

He went to his chest again, and returning put into my left hand a sharp brass pin, some three inches in length.

"With this pin," he said, "you must make the Laughing Nymph weep. You must plunge it, with your left hand, deep into her left arm, and while she is weeping you must flee away; and thus you will get rid of the black hair on the right side of your head. But if you laugh with her, or remain until she stops weeping, you will never return."

He took from his spinning wheel a thread some yard and a half long, and holding it in his teeth made fast a large loop at one end. He then placed the thread in my left hand.

"This loop," he said, "you must throw over the head of the Great Horned Owl with your left hand. When you have done so, he will follow you; you must lead him into the river Tarn, and hold him there until he drowns; and thus you will get rid of the black hair in the middle of your head, and be cured forever. But the owl, though he is blind by day, has very sharp ears. You must not let him hear your voice."

*The Burning Glass, the Brass Pin, and the Loop of Thread*

He then gave me the most minute directions how to reach the Great Cave, the Three-Spire Rock, and the half-

moon pasture of Korbi; and I thereupon placed in my pocket the burning glass, the pin, and the thread, and drew the Princess after me to the door and down to my room, where I immediately began my preparations for departure.

That night I left. The Princess wept on my shoulder, but I laughed gayly, and ridiculed her fears.

"Don't you feel sorry," she said, "to leave me?"

"Come, dearest," I said, "you mustn't begrudge me a little adventure. Don't be selfish."

She straightened herself up. "Yes," she said, "I think you had better go."

I did not understand this sudden change, but I kissed her and said:

"Did you pack my white leather suit?"

"Yes, it is in the saddlebag, and extra shoes. Be sure to change if you get your feet wet."

I kissed my hand to her from the saddle and gave my horse the rein. I was off upon my adventure.

At the end of two days I came to the village which lies at the foot of Thunder Mountain. It was a bright day, and the sun was hot. As I trotted briskly through the village street, a child of three or four years ran from the door of a house directly to the front of my horse and under its feet; and in an instant the horse had knocked him down and trampled over his body. I looked round, and heard the child cry out in pain; but I was intent on what lay before me, and too happy in my new career to be bothered with trifles, and I sped on rapidly, and was soon well up the mountainside.

I came to a place among the rocks and bushes where there was no longer any trail, and there I tied my horse and left him. I kept in view, as I climbed higher and higher, a great, gray rock, shaped like a dome and as big as a house, which projected from the very top of the mountain. Under this rock, as I knew, lay the cave of the Man of Ice.

The higher I climbed, the steeper grew the ascent; trees became fewer and at length there were none; I looked abroad and saw, beyond the intervening mountains, the Great Sea afar off, wrinkling in the sunshine. I came at last to a point so high that I was quite dizzy when I looked down. Around me were only bowlders; there were not even any bushes, nor birds nor squirrels; nothing but rocks and sunshine.

### *He Hears Thunder in a Clear Sky*

I stopped suddenly and listened. A distant rumble of thunder came from the top of the mountain. I was, as I may say, thunderstruck; for there was not a cloud in the sky. As I mounted higher, the rolling of thunder became louder and louder; and when I reached, as I did at last after hours of toil, the dome-shaped rock at the top, thunder crashed all about me with a deafening roar, although the sky remained as clear as before.

I halted at the foot of the great rock, and commenced the task of finding the entrance to the cave. The surface of the rock seemed quite unbroken; but I found at length, near the ground, a single crack, about an inch in width.



I inserted my fingers, but I could not budge it; and remembering the directions given me by the sorcerer, I cried out, "In the name of the sun! I command you, open!"

The rock beneath the crack began to move, and before my astonished eyes it fell slowly inward, leaving a gaping hole, just wide enough to admit my body.

I did not delay. I took the burning glass from my pocket and held it up in my left hand to the sun, and when I thought it well filled with the sun's rays I crawled in through the hole. When I was inside, the opening closed behind me, and I was in utter darkness. It was very cold, and the noise of thunder was louder than before. I was surprised to see at a little distance a single spot of light, which flickered here and there as I crept on; but I soon observed that it came from the burning glass which I was still holding in my left hand.

### *He Goes Down into the Cave in Thunder Mountain*

I was aware that I was going downward. The farther I went, the louder became the thunder. I must have descended thus for a minute or two, when a gust of cold air swept my face, and, finding the floor level, I stood up. The sound of thunder was now deafening, beyond anything I had yet heard.

As I stood there, a great mass of what appeared to be ice, larger than my body, rolled past me and disappeared in the darkness. I jumped aside, and walked on. In another moment a mass of ice like the first fell at my side and rolled away; a rush of the bitterest cold air

accompanied it; and as it struck the ground a crash of thunder shook the place, and its sound, as it rolled away into the dark, was the sound of thunder rumbling afar off among the mountains.

I now understood the origin of the thunder I had heard in the clear sunlight outside. I pointed my burning glass upward, and I was able to make out dimly, in the ceiling, great numbers of these bodies of ice, hanging there like stalactites, but rounded at the bottom and very slender at the top, so that they appeared to hang by little more than a thread. As I stumbled on, one after another of these fell to the ground with a crash and rolled away with a decreasing rumble. There was no telling when one of them might fall on me, and I could only trust to luck. There was nothing to do but to get forward as quickly as possible; time was flying, and even if I should escape these thunder stones, I had only three or four minutes of my seven left. I darted blindly on, and the ice came crashing about me faster and faster, until I thought my head would split with the noise. Once or twice I was nearly struck. How I escaped I do not know, for it became certain that the thunder stones were dropping closer and closer around me, as if they were trying to halt me. And all the time the cold was becoming so bitter that my feet and legs were already numb.

I suddenly found myself walking on a slippery film of ice, and at that moment I knew that I had cleared the chamber of thunder, and had left that danger behind me; the noise abated to a distant rumbling.

The ice on which I walked was very thin, and at every step it crackled under me; and I could just make out the sound of the rushing beneath it of a torrent of water. I stepped lightly and quickly, seeing nothing but the blackness of night before me. I ran. The ice swayed and crackled and ripped; and just as it gave way under me and my foot plunged in the freezing water, I found myself again on the solid floor of the cavern, and ran with all my might. I could see nothing of walls or ceiling. I was lost in the dark.

In another moment I was aware of a kind of vague paleness afar off before me, and I ran in that direction. As I did so, the paleness, whatever it was, moved swiftly to the right, and I changed my course accordingly. It then moved to the left, and as fast as I changed my course it moved also; evidently it was trying to avoid me. I gained on it, and it seemed then to try to pass me on one side and get in my rear; but I was too quick for it, and came up with it before it had quite passed me. I came within ten feet of it, and saw what it was.

*He Pursues the Man of Ice with the Burning Glass*

It was the Man of Ice. He was running about like a cornered rat: a perfectly formed old man, his face and head hairless, and his whole body of solid ice. He ran jerkily; I could hear his joints crackle as he ran; and he was almost transparent, and of a pale, greenish brightness. His fingers were stiff and pointed, like icicles; and his eyes were like little white marbles.



When he found that he could not pass me, he ran back into the cave; but we were evidently near its rear wall, and in a moment he was darting back and forth against this wall, for all the world like a cornered rat. I kept after him, and flashing the burning glass constantly in his direction forced him at last into a corner. He turned upon me there, and stretched out his long stiff fingers and made as if to spring upon me. I knew that if he should touch me I should be lost; it must be now or never; I turned the burning glass full upon him, and before he could spring its little spot of light flickered upon the center of his breast.

The change which came over him nearly caused me to drop the glass. The top of his head melted away before my eyes and dripped down over his ears; his eyes, his nose, his cheeks, his chin, turned one after another to water and flowed down over his shoulders, and as I moved the beam of sunlight lower and lower he slowly melted away from shoulder to foot, and was no more than a wet spot on the floor.

*He Commences to Make His Escape from the Cave*

I turned swiftly to make my way out of the cave. As I did so the light from my burning glass went out, and the cave was suddenly flooded with pure sunlight, from what source I could not make out. I was in a vast, vaulted chamber, which I did not remain to examine. I sped to a wide opening which I saw before me, and passing through it came to the side of a little brook bordered with golden-yellow flowers. I waded across the brook; its water was

as warm as milk. On the other side I entered the thunder chamber, now well lit with sunshine, and there I paused in amazement. It was in perfect silence. The air was mild and balmy. In place of the terrible stones of ice, thick green vines clung to the ceiling. I gave a shout of joy, and ran to a little opening which I saw on the farther side. Through this I crawled, and on my hands and knees ascended the passage down which I had first come, and arrived at the entrance to the cave, now closed. "Open!" I shouted. "In the name of the sun, I command you, open!" The rock fell outward, and I crawled through into the light of day.

I had gone quite a mile down the mountainside before I realized that there was no sound of thunder; I looked up at the top of the mountain and paused to listen; all was silent, sunny, and peaceful. I had accomplished my first adventure with complete success.

When I reached the village at the foot of the mountain, my first thought was of the child whom my horse had injured earlier in the day. I dismounted, and after a few moments' inquiry found where he lived. I was admitted to the house by his mother, who led me to an inner room, where I beheld on a chair by a window an unusually charming little fellow, with his left arm in a splint. I sat down before him and took him on my lap and held him carefully in my arms. He took to me at once; and I was pleased to feel, as his warm little body pressed close to me, a decided warmth creep slowly and gently into my own heart. I forced the mother, who was poor, to accept

from me the only amends I could make: a purse of gold from my belt, bestowed with a warm shake of the hand. As I said good-by, I glanced at the mirror which hung upon the wall. I went up to it, and looked more intently. The black hair which had been on the left side of my head was gone.

I pressed on the same night, and arrived in due time at the town of Ventamere, on the shore of the Great Sea. I bought a boat, not too large to be handled by a single man, and rigged with a single sail of a charming orange color, somewhat patched with blue.

Like all the islanders, I knew well how to manage a boat, and I could see that my little bark was entirely seaworthy. I provisioned her for a long voyage, being mindful, of course, of the return. With a light and favorable wind above and an ebbing tide, I set sail.

### *He Sails Across the Great Sea*

As I cleared the bay and encountered the long, smooth roll of the Great Sea, I thought, sitting with my hand on the tiller, of the dear Princess whom I had left behind me. I remembered that I had charged her with selfishness, and I began to doubt whether I had been altogether just. For the first time within my memory, I felt a little uneasy on the subject of my own conduct. However, this shadow lasted only a moment. I sang as I sailed.

The weather was superb, and the sea, under moderate winds, never rose above a long and quiet swell. During the entire voyage there was nothing more exciting than



an occasional gull on easy wing circling about the peak of my mast, and the flying fish now and then skimming low across the surface of the sea.

As I neared the far shore of the Great Sea, the green of the water became a deep indigo, and I could not but rejoice in the lovely effect amidst that expanse of rich color of the orange of my sail. I had held the course prescribed by the sorcerer, and I knew that I should pick up the Three-Spire Rock on sighting land.

It came to pass as I expected. My faithful boat slipped, early of a luminous evening, into the placid waters of a little bay. On either hand a promontory of noble height jutted out into the sea, and from the shallow water near the shore, against the inmost curve of the beach, rose in three pinnacles a great, black rock, washed by a gentle and surfless tide, and towering above as tall as the masts of a ship: the Three-Spire Rock, beyond a doubt.

I ran my boat almost up to the beach, the tide being at flood, and anchored there. I put on my fine white leather suit, as being suitable for the visit I had now to make, and waded ashore with a line which for further security I made fast to a log partly imbedded in the sand. I then climbed upon the shoreward side of the Three-Spire Rock, and began my search for the Laughing Nymph.

I examined every inch of that side of the rock as far as I could climb, without finding any sign of an opening. I made my way slowly around the rock to the seaward side, examining it carefully as I went, still without success. I reached the outer side of the rock in despair.

The light of day was fast waning, and I would soon be forced to give up my search for the night. The water, which swelled and receded noiselessly about the rock, became black and unfriendly. It was very lonesome. Not a gull nor curlew nor sandpiper could be seen anywhere. The place was too silent altogether. I pressed along the seaward face of the rock.

Before me, at a little distance, the tide had filled to the brim a sort of bowl in the rock, open toward the bay, in which the water stood some five or six feet deep. I came to this bowl and paused to select the best way for clambering round it. I looked down into the still water which filled it, and saw there a sight which almost made my heart stop beating.

### *He Finds a Child in a Pool of the Rock*

Floating there was the body of a drowned child. I gave a cry of pity and stooped down to look at him. It was a naked boy of some two years, exceedingly beautiful. I stooped lower and gazed into his upturned face. It was the face of my own child.

It could not be; I had myself seen him, with my own eyes, far from here, in his mother's arms, many months ago,—and yet, the longer I gazed upon him, the more certainly I knew that it was my own child. I could not be deceived. I leaned down closer and put my arms under him and drew him up and folded him to my breast. He was cold and wet, but beautiful beyond anything I had ever dreamed of him. I stood up, and held his cheek

against my own. It seemed to me I had never known until this moment how dear he had been to me. I leaned, almost fainting, against the face of the rock, and rested his fair round body in my arm for a moment against a smooth shelf in the wall. His little shoulder lightly touched the rock; and where it touched, a slight depression seemed to appear, as if the rock had been a cushion. As I looked, the depression grew deeper and wider; it deepened and widened until it became a hollow vault, in which I could see nothing but darkness.

Holding the fair boy close to my breast, I stepped into the dark vault, and walked carefully forward toward the interior of the rock. In a moment the passage made a turn to the right, and I found myself in a brightly lighted room with a peaked ceiling, very lofty, whose floor and walls were all of mother-of-pearl. In sconces on the walls were hundreds of burning candles, and divans and chairs covered with the richest silks were ranged beneath them. A door in the opposite wall stood open, and I entered through this another room of the same kind, with peaked ceiling, candles, mother-of-pearl, and all. As I stood in this room I heard the tinkling of a musical instrument and the singing of a voice. A door stood open opposite me as before, and through this I entered a third room, precisely like the others, and stopped in amazement. There, on a divan against the wall, under a blaze of candles, sat my wife.



*The Laughing Nymph in the Three-Spired Rock*

She was singing gayly and accompanying her song upon a lute. When she saw me she laughed merrily and bade me sit down beside her. I remained standing where I was, doubting whether I had lost my senses, and hugging the beautiful child to my breast. There was no mistake. It was my wife indeed. I forgot for the moment the strangeness of the encounter, and went to her and held out the child.

"See!" I cried. "Have done with laughing! Your child! He is drowned! I have brought him to you! See!"

She looked at me with such merriment in her face as I had never seen there before. She laughed again and again. I thought she would never have done laughing. I was petrified with horror.

"Stop!" I cried. "I must make you understand me! It is your child! Do you understand? Can you look at him and laugh? For shame, for shame!"

She calmed her laughter somewhat.

"Why, what is there in that," she said, "to make me weep? If you only knew how ridiculous you look! Oh, dear!" And she went off into a peal of laughter gayer than before.

"Take him!" I said. "Look down at that little face, and smile again if you dare!" And I laid him in her lap.

She took him up carelessly and placed him out of her way on the divan.

"Really," she said, "you mustn't expect to disturb me with these things. I was singing a lovely new song when you came in. Listen!" And she took the lute in her hands and began to sing a stave of her song.

I felt a wave of anger rise within me. I rushed upon her blindly and tore the lute from her hands and dashed it on the floor. I seized her shoulders and shook her violently; and the more violently I shook her the more she laughed. I bethought me of the pin which lay in my pocket, and at the same time there flashed into my mind what the sorcerer had said about the Laughing Nymph; I had quite forgotten them both. I snatched the pin forth from my pocket with my left hand, and closing my eyes plunged it deep into the left arm of the Laughing Nymph.

She did not scream with pain, but her laughter instantly ceased. She looked at me with surprise, as if she were now seeing me for the first time. An expression of reproachful sorrow came over her face; tears started into her eyes and rolled down her cheeks; and suddenly she buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly. She arose, and threw herself on her knees beside the child and called to him wildly, sobbing as if her heart would break.

I looked on for a moment with my brain in a whirl. A strong impulse of love and pity moved me to put my arm around her and comfort her; but I restrained myself, and in that moment I saw what it all meant; I left the Laughing Nymph still weeping beside the child, and fled.

*The Second Black Hair Is Gone*

Outside, on the beach, under the stars, I collected my disordered wits. I went to the little cabin in my boat, and gazed at myself in the mirror which hung upon its wall. My eyes were unnaturally large and hollow; my cheeks were pale; and the black hair which had been on the right side of my head was gone.

I gathered together such provisions as I could carry, and seeing that the boat was well secured, I departed upon my third and last adventure.

Many days I traveled. The sorcerer had given me my course with much particularity, and there was no question of losing my way. My thoughts were sad company, and yet I felt a kind of elation. I began to look back on myself with horror, and to remember the sweetness of my Princess with admiration and love.

One morning I ascended a long wooded hill and stood upon its top. Below me, at no great distance, lay a river, curved at this point outward like a crescent. On its farther side stretched a field some two miles deep, grown high with grass and flowers, and bounded at its rear by a high cliff whose walls at either end met the river, enclosing the field so that its shape, between them and the river, was roughly that of a half-moon. It was, without a doubt, the pasture of Korbi, beside the river Tarn. The time for my last adventure had arrived.

I descended rapidly to the river, first leaving my pack in a safe place, and waded across the stream; it came to



my shoulders, but I had no difficulty in reaching the other side. I pressed forward through the tall grass to the foot of the cliff. I walked along its base until I found above me on its face, somewhat higher than my reach, a circle of white stones; and by this I knew that it was at this point that I must climb.

The ascent was excessively difficult. I mounted, with great pain, to a point so high that I no longer dared look below; I fixed my eyes on each crevice and cranny as they appeared above me, and tried to think of nothing but my next step upward. I was nearing the top. I looked up, and saw directly overhead a great boulder which projected from the face of the cliff, evidently at its very summit. This was the boulder of which the sorcerer had spoken as the abode of the Great Horned Owl. A dozen more painful steps brought me to the under side of the boulder. I clung to the cliff with both hands, and without a sound crept along its face until I was out from under the boulder on its left side, and then climbed noiselessly upward until I stood beside the boulder so as to look across its top. There I saw, at my right, the object of my search.

*The Great Horned Owl Stands Ready for the Loop of Thread*

The Great Horned Owl was standing motionless, his wide eyes staring across the valley of the Tarn. I was thankful that in that bright light of the sun he was blind. He did not turn his head in my direction, and he was evidently unaware of my presence. His feathers, as I

could see, were flakes or scales of some shining metal. He looked harmless enough, and I felt myself full of confidence.

The hand which was nearest him was my right. Holding on to the cliff with my left, I took from my pocket, with my right, the thread which the sorcerer had given me, and cleared the loop so that I could drop it over the creature's head without tangling. I leaned across the bowlder toward him, keeping very quiet, and brought my right hand with the loop so close to him that I could have touched him. With that hand I held the loop above his head and began to lower it. It came down closer and closer; it reached the top of his head; I held my breath; my eyes were fixed on his; I lowered the loop another inch or two, until it came to his curved beak, without touching him; and I was about to drop it over his neck,—when suddenly he flapped his wings and fluttered his feathers all together; and all the little metal plates on his body striking one another gave off a rattling discharge of sharp reports, so violent that I thought the cliff was being blown to pieces. I jumped with fright, and scarcely refrained from uttering a cry; but I held my tongue, and dropped the loop around his neck.

Instantly the metal feathers were still and the noise ceased, and the owl turned his head slowly toward me and stared straight into my face; and as he gazed at me, all at once it came to me that I had dropped the noose with my right hand instead of my left. I was aghast at my mistake. I tugged at the thread frantically, but the

owl did not budge. I began to grow dizzy. My arm tingled and grew numb. Everything turned black before my eyes. I could not remember where I was. I swayed and lost my balance; I felt myself falling; I clutched wildly for support, but touched nothing; I felt myself falling through space, falling, falling, as a person falls in a dream, for hours as it seemed, sick and dizzy. Only once did I touch anything, and then I felt in my knee a sharp pain, and was conscious that I was bleeding from a cut; and then I knew no more.

When I came to myself, I was standing at the foot of the cliff, where I had commenced my ascent. I looked upward, and wondered that I was alive after such a fall. As my eye traveled downward and rested on the circle of white stones above me I noticed in their center a little splotch of blood, evidently from my knee where it had been cut in my fall; and as I continued to look, the splotch grew into a blood-red flower, waving on a long stem. I felt a strange desire to take the flower in my teeth and tear it.

*Alb Sees in the River the Reflection of a Unicorn*

I wondered whether anything had happened to the hair in the middle of my head. I went to the river, and looked down at myself in a clear pool near the bank. I was surprised to see there the reflection of a small white horse's head. I turned round, to see the animal which must have been looking over my shoulder. No animal was there. I could not understand it. I looked again at the surface of the



water; the same head met my gaze; a small white horse's head, and in the center of it a sharp, white horn. I looked behind me again, and again into the river. I stood in the water, and saw there the full image of the little white horse. It was myself.

Thus (said the young man, sitting in the half-moon pasture of Korbi, by the river Tarn), you know my story. I have kept count of the days since my enchantment, and they now amount to two years; the age of my little son when he was drowned. You have taken from me the third black hair, and I shall now fly back to my beloved Princess, cured of the curse of perpetual happiness, to spend with her the remainder of my days in blessed light and shadow, peace and storm, laughter and tears.

*"I wonder," said Bojohn thoughtfully, after a moment's silence, "who the old man was who gave him the curse in the first place."*

*"Did Alb tell you," said Bodkin, "who the old man was?"*

*"No," said Solario; "I don't believe he ever knew. But I happen to know, myself, because it was revealed to me in the course of the story which was told me by—"*

*"Tell us! Tell us!" cried the two boys.*

*"No," said Solario, "it is much too late, and I must now, if you will permit me, bid you good night."*



## THE THIRD NIGHT

### THE SON OF THE TAILOR OF OOGH

**T**HE King was engaged with the Master of the Wardrobe in a game of chess in the throne room, and the Princess Dorobel (the King's daughter) and her husband Prince Bilbo were looking on.

In the next room the Queen was at dominoes with the Second Lady in Waiting, and Prince Bojohn (her grandson) and his friend Bodkin came and stood behind their chairs.

"Grandmother," said Bojohn, "wouldn't you like to hear a story?"

"Not now, my dear," said the Queen, and she put down a double five, smiling at the Lady in Waiting.

"Come along, then," said Bojohn to Bodkin. They went into the throne room, and stood behind the King's chair.

*"Grandfather," said Bojohn, "would n't you like to hear a story?"*

*"You made a fatal mistake in moving your knight," said The King. "I will now move my bishop and put you in check. So!"*

*"Grandfather!" said Bojohn. "Wouldn't you like to—"*

*"Take your time, take your time," said the King. "If you move out of check, I'll have you in three moves. See if I don't!"*

*"Grandfather!" said Bojohn.*

*"Ah!" said the King. "That's different. Hum. Ha. I didn't think you'd do that. Plague take it, now I've got to think up something else."*

*The Princess Dorobel placed her arm around the shoulder of Bojohn her son. She was radiant in a white evening gown, and she wore pearls in her hair.*

*"Never mind, my dear," said she, "I'd like to hear a story."*

*"And father too!" said Bojohn. "Come along, both of you!"*

*The Princess Dorobel put her arm in her husband's, and hurried him away after the two boys, who were already going out at the door.*

*They followed the boys through dark halls and up a staircase into the northeast tower, and stopped, all four, before the door of Solario's room. Prince Bojohn knocked, and a voice from within bade them enter.*

*Mortimer the Executioner, seven feet tall and vast as a*





Mortimer the Executioner was being measured by Solario for a suit



hogshead around the middle, was standing in his shirt sleeves beside the table, and before him stood Solario on a chair, measuring him with a tape. On the table lay a pile of cloth, with shears, chalk, needles, thread, and wax.

Solario jumped down from his chair and bowed. He was plainly in high good humor.

"Be seated, be seated, I pray you," he cried, bringing up chairs in a hurry. "This is a great honor; a very great honor indeed. You see me in the midst of my— Pray be seated. Will you excuse me while I note down the shoulder measurement?" He bent over the table, and jotted down some figures in a book. "Mortimer," said he, "you may go now. We will continue our labors in the morning."

Mortimer, in confusion, hastily put on his coat, which caused a couple of white mice to jump from his pockets and run up his sleeves.

"Don't go," said the Princess Dorobel. "We are about to ask our good friend Solario for a story, and I am sure you would like to hear it."

"Yes," said Prince Bilbo, "we have come to hear another story, if you will be good enough to—"

"The story of Montesango's Cave!" cried both boys, together.

"Or the Roving Griffin!" cried Bojohn.

"Or the Blind Giant!" cried Bodkin.

"If you will pardon me," said Solario, "I think that it would please Prince Bilbo and the Princess better, perhaps, to hear the story told me by the Black Prince on the memorable night when—"



*"Don't forget," said Bodkin, "we want to hear about the old man with the shaggy eyebrows, who got the golden chain away from the goldsmith's son."*

*"I will tell you," said Solario, "about the old man and about the Black Prince at the same time."*

*"We know nothing," said Prince Bilbo, "about any old man with shaggy eyebrows."*

*"I'll tell you, father!" said Bojohn; and he told what he knew. "Now then!" he said to Solario. "Please go on!"*

*Solario the tailor seated himself cross-legged on his table, and the others drew up their chairs before him in a row.*

*"Has the old man with the shaggy eyebrows," said Prince Bilbo, "something to do with the Black Prince?"*

*"Precisely, sir," said Solario. "If you are ready, I will relate to you the story which the Black Prince told me on the memorable night when— However. Are you ready?"*

*"Dear me!" said the Princess Dorobel. "This is very cozy, indeed."*

*"Go on!" cried Bojohn; and Solario, picking up his shears and gazing at them thoughtfully for a moment, began, in the following words,*

#### THE STORY OF THE BLACK PRINCE

You must know, most excellent Solario (said the Black Prince) that my father, the King of Wen, called me to him one morning, and taking me into his private cabinet, spoke to me as follows.

"My son," said he, "you are aware what anxiety I have suffered, throughout my reign, regarding my city of Oogh,

by reason of its remoteness from my castle. I have, as you know, been unable to visit it since my early youth. It is now some four years since I sent to that city, to govern it in my stead, our friend Urban, so well-beloved among us for his unfailing courtesy."

"Oh!" said Bojohn. "That must be the Courteous Stranger." Solario said, "Precisely."

"For many months," continued my father, the King of Wen, "I have had no word from him, and I fear that some misfortune has befallen him. I design therefore, my son, to send you to the city of Oogh, to find out what is wrong, and if necessary to lend him aid. It will be best for you to enter the city without making yourself known. Your mission may be dangerous, and I accordingly wish you to wear this doublet, which will protect you against all harm so long as it remains intact. I know of no power which can remove it from your person, or detach from it even a single button; but I warn you to be careful, for any injury to it will deprive it of all virtue, and the consequences to you in that case might be serious. Take the doublet from me with your left hand, and I will tell you how I came into possession of it."

Thereupon my father with his left hand placed the doublet in my left hand, and commenced

#### THE STORY OF THE MAGIC DOUBLET

"When I was a young man," said my father,—

"Please excuse me, Solario," said Prince Bilbo; "don't

*you think it might be better to go on with the main story, without stopping to—”*

*“Really, I think it would,” said the Princess Dorobel.*

*“Oh, mother!” said Bojohn.*

*“If it is your pleasure,” said Solario, “I will omit the story of the magic doublet for the present.”*

*“I really think it would be better,” said the Princess Dorobel.*

*“Oh, shucks,” said Bojohn to Bodkin, in a whisper.*

*“This is the doublet,” said my father when he had finished his story, “which, as I have told you, was made by the One-Armed Sorcerer with his left hand. Prepare now for your journey, my son, and good fortune attend you.”*

All that day I spent in preparation, and early on the next morning I set forth for the city of Oogh. My daughter, the Princess Amadore, implored me to take her with me. She was ever of an ardent and adventurous spirit, and she would not listen to my objections on the score of danger. She usually had her way with me, and I knew from the first that there was no use in resisting her entreaties; and the upshot of it was that I yielded, though much against my judgment.

### *The Prince and His Daughter Set Forth for Oogh*

In due time we made our way to the city of Fadz on the seacoast, where we took ship for Oogh; and for some two weeks we sailed the Great Sea with favorable winds. At the end of that time we were blown out of our course by storms, and took shelter in the Island Kingdom, at a port



called Ventamere, whence we visited the kingdom's capital city, and arrived there in time to witness, as the King's guests, the marriage of his daughter the Princess Hyla to one Alb, a goldsmith's son, a youth of exceedingly cheerful and engaging manners. This ceremony over, we returned to Ventamere, and there took ship once more for Oogh.

No further accident delayed us, and after a week we sighted that part of the mainland which my father had described to me. At my direction we were put ashore, my daughter and myself, at a point where, as I knew, I should find the road to Oogh.

Leaving orders for the ship to ride at a safe distance from shore against our return, we turned our faces inland; but before going further, I darkened my face, neck, and hands with walnut juice, and dressed myself in patched and threadbare clothing. I put on my magic doublet, but concealed it beneath a rude blue smock. I tried to persuade my daughter to darken her face also, but she positively refused to ruin her complexion, as she expressed it, and I now regretted bitterly that I had brought her with me. I was able to persuade her, however, to put on a coarse and tattered gown, but she did it very unwillingly. I had provided myself with some trinkets of silver, odds and ends of lace and silk, and children's toys, and these I now slung on my back in a pack. Thus, in the character of a peddler and his daughter, we set forth upon the road to Oogh.

*A Strange Encounter at a Wayside Well*

Late in the afternoon we saw before us the roofs of the city, and at the end of the road a gate in the city wall. At the same time we perceived, in a clump of trees, a wayside well, and we were hastening toward it, being tired and thirsty, when we heard a voice in that direction, which was exclaiming angrily:

"There! Take that! I hate you, I hate you! Oh, if I could never see you again!"

Hearing no reply to this outburst, and wondering who it was that could take such language in silence, we hurried forward, and saw, standing beside the well, under the trees, a boy and no one else; a boy of some twelve years of age, dressed in a gorgeous robe of pale yellow silk; a singularly beautiful boy, with great dark eyes and curly dark hair, but a face extremely pallid and stained with tears; a face, in fact, the saddest I had ever seen in a child. He was picking up from the wet ground beside the well handfuls of mud, and spattering his silk robe with it; and as we arrived he tore from his head a cap of spotless white velvet and stamped it into the mud, crying out, "I won't wear you any more, I won't! I hate you!" And then he burst into tears and flung himself full length on his face in the mud, beating the ground with his hands and muttering brokenly to himself.

We paused in astonishment, but my daughter, recovering herself quickly, ran to him and put her hand on his shoulder. He sat up, startled. He rose to his feet timidly,

and gazed at us with big round eyes, trying to choke back his sobs. He was mud from head to foot, and his gorgeous robe was ruined.

My daughter coaxed him to tell her what was the matter, but he made no answer; instead, he pulled off the ruined robe and flung it in the mud, and standing in his shirt and breeches stamped upon it and burst into tears again, and cried, "I won't wear it! I want to be poor! I want to be like the others! Oh, the wicked Eyebrow! Why can't he be good like the others? Oh, if I could only cut off the Eyebrow and make him poor and good like the others!"

My daughter took his hand and begged him to tell her his trouble, but all he would say was, "He's wicked, and I want him to be good like the others! And to-night he's going to give the Blind Bowler to Goolk the Spider, and I can't stop him, I can't stop him!" And he broke into a fresh storm of sobbing.

My daughter shook her head at me pityingly.

"We are very sorry, my lad," said I, "and I ask you to trust us. We are going into the city, and perhaps when you know us better you will tell us all about it. We should like to help you. Will you come with us?"

"What can a peddler do against the Eyebrow?" said the boy,—but he dried his tears, and allowed my daughter to lead him forth by the hand into the road.

We could make nothing of the boy's wild talk, but we went onward without questioning him further, and drew near to the city in silence. Beside the city gate, under the wall, a crowd of idle people were gathered, and from the



center of the group we could hear voices singing together hoarsely. In a few minutes we were in the midst of the crowd, and saw what it was the idlers were looking at.

*The Three Blind Ballad Singers*

Three blind men were singing a comic ballad in loud voices, and prancing up and down in time, with such antics that the crowd roared with delight. Each of the three held in his hand a sheaf of papers,—ballads, undoubtedly, intended for sale to the onlookers. Suddenly they stopped, each with a hand at his ear, and looked up at the sky as if listening.

"Is there a stranger here?" cried one of them.

"A peddler and a maid!" shouted one of the crowd.  
"All tattered and torn!"

"With eyebrows?" cried the ballad singer.

"Yes! yes!" said several of the crowd together.

I did not like this sort of attention very well, and I was about to draw my daughter away, when the ballad singers faced with one accord in my direction and began to cry, "Buy our ballads! Ho, master Eyebrows! Buy our ballads! Welcome to Oogh, master Eyebrows!"

The faces and heads of these three fellows were covered with black hair; but I now noticed that not one of them had the vestige of an eyebrow; and I observed further that there was not an eyebrow amongst all the crowd, with the exception only of the boy at my side; and as to him, the people, when they saw him, suddenly fell silent, and backed away from him with something like fear in their

eyes. The boy observed it, as I could see, and looked as if he were going to cry again.

"What do we say, brothers," shouted one of the ballad singers, "what do we say to the damsel in the tattered gown? Shall one of us marry the tattered damsel? Oh, yes, oh, yes! Tra la, tra la,—"

He paused, as if waiting for a laugh; but the crowd did not laugh any more, and my daughter was herself in fact the only one who seemed to be amused. As for myself, I was beginning to be angry.

"We'll marry the Lady Tatters!" cried the blind man. "O-o-oh!" And he burst into a loud song, in which the other two joined, all three prancing up and down meanwhile in a ridiculous dance. So far as I can recollect it, their song went something like this:

"O Lady Tatters! O Lady Tatters!  
 We scorn the fellow who basely flatters,  
 But we can't help saying that nobody matters  
 But you, fair lady, but you, but you!  
 Tra la, tra la, tra la, tra la,  
 We know that it's generally customary  
 In cases like these to be shy and wary,  
 For often enough in matrimony  
 There's plenty of gall mixed in with the honey,  
 How true that is! how true! how true!  
 Tra la, tra la, tra la, tra la,  
 But under existing circumstances  
 Every fellow must take some chances,  
 Refusing to bother concerning expenses  
 And other deplorable consequences,  
 Cheerfully scorning each friendly warning,—

How few regard it! how few! how few!  
Tra la, tra la, tra la, tra la,  
O Lady Tatters! O Lady Tatters!  
We've duly considered these difficult matters,  
And now, without any reservation,  
We're ready to enter the marriage relation!  
You've only to view our reliable faces  
And gaze on our truly superlative graces,  
To note that the suitors by whom you're attended  
Come really remarkably well recommended,—  
But it's all in the point of view! How true!  
It's all in the point of view!  
Tra la, tra la, tra la, tra la,—"

"Silence, rogues!" I cried, out of all patience at their impudence, but my daughter burst out laughing. It was ever her way to be amused rather than annoyed.

"Master Eyebrows!" shouted the first ballad singer. "Choose one of us for the tattered damsel! What will you take for her? Speak."

"You shall have the Shears!" shouted the second ballad singer.

"The Shears of Sharpness!" shouted the third.

"See, Eyebrows!" cried the first. "The Shears of Sharpness!"

### *The Blind Ballad Singer Displays the Shears of Sharpness*

He drew from under his gown a pair of tailor's shears, and as he did so the crowd fell back as if in alarm. He stepped toward the city wall, and placed his hand on a flat iron bar, some two or three inches in width, supporting



an awning over a booth; and applying his shears to it, he cut it through and through as if it had been paper. I gasped in amazement; never had I seen a pair of shears like those.

"The Shears for the lady!" cried the blind man. "Come, Eyebrows, choose!"

"Impudent rascal," said I, "the lady is my daughter, and I foresee that a good scourging is awaiting you. Come, Amadore!"

"But buy our ballads!" cried the second ballad singer. "Buy our ballads!" cried the others, and each of the three thrust toward me one of his papers.

I took them, and paying over a few coppers, moved on toward the city gate. "Father!" said Amadore in my ear. "The boy is gone!"

It was true. The boy had slipped away, and was gone. The idlers began to laugh again, and I drew my daughter after me into the city.

In a moment we were standing in a street of shops, and my daughter, laughing again, begged me to read my ballads. I glanced at the sheets, still angry, and was about to toss them away, when I observed that they were blank, or nearly so, and I looked at them more closely.

On the first were written these words, and nothing more: "Hurry. Hurry."

On the second I found these words only: "The Cobweb Room in the Governor's Palace."

On the third were these words only: "The Eyebrows of Babadag the Tailor."

I stared at my daughter in perplexity; but she urged that these could be no other than messages on behalf of our friend Urban, and that we must find him without a moment's delay. We walked on briskly, intending to inquire our way to the governor's palace.

*The Strange Conduct of the People of Oogh*

As we went on, we became aware of a general and oppressive stillness. A few people were in the street, and some could be seen inside the shops; but they conversed in low tones, and they seemed to be idle, indifferent, and listless. Here and there a shopkeeper sat in a chair before his shop, gazing blankly at the opposite wall.

Of the first of these shopkeepers I inquired the direction of the governor's palace. The man started from his reverie, as if frightened, rose from his chair, stared at me curiously, and without a word went into his shop and closed the door. "Did you see?" said my daughter. "He had no eyebrows."

At the next corner we came to an open market of stalls, and there I repeated my inquiry. Instead of the usual bustle and clamor of a market, there was the same silence, though the place was thronged with people. I nudged my daughter in surprise, for among all these people there was not an eyebrow. The venders were making no effort, apparently, to sell their wares, and the customers were buying with an air of indifference, as if the business bored them. I began to feel depressed, and even my daughter was sober.

The market man of whom I asked my direction looked anxiously about him before answering, and then whispered hurriedly, "I've nothing to do with it. Nothing. How do you come to be wearing eyebrows here?"

Without answering him, I applied at two or three other stalls, but the only result was a shaking of heads and a curious, wide gaze, as of mild alarm. There was nothing to do but to search out unaided the most pretentious house in the city; for such a house, undoubtedly, would be the governor's residence.

We walked the streets for more than an hour; and everywhere was the same silence, the same listlessness, the same apathy. "I don't believe," said my daughter, "that these people have any wills of their own at all."

"Certainly," said I, "they have no eyebrows of their own, at least. Except for the boy who ran away from us, I haven't seen an eyebrow in the city. It seems strange."

### *The Mansion in the Ruined Park*

We ascended a hill, and came to a park gate, at a point from which we could see the entire city below us. Through the gate, across the park, we saw a residence more imposing than any we had yet seen. The gate hung wide open on broken hinges, and the park within was in a state of ruin.

"This must be it," said my daughter.

"It seems unlikely," said I, "but we will soon know."

We made our way across the park, through tall weeds and tangled brambles, and stood before a splendid but

gloomy mansion. The door was swinging open, and we entered.

All was silent within. A sense of calamity seemed to pervade the place; plainly it was deserted. We walked on through spacious apartments, and everywhere was furniture of the richest description, but covered with dust and hung with cobwebs. We stopped finally, far within, before a door which appeared to lead outside.

"It is no use," said I. "Our friend is gone, if he was ever here, and we must seek him elsewhere."

"No, no," said my daughter. "We must find the Cobweb Room."

She led the way out into an open court green with moss and weeds, in the center of which was a fountain with a dry and littered basin beneath it. I stopped suddenly, and listened. "Hark!" said I. From a distance came, or seemed to come, the voices of the three blind ballad singers, shouting out some ribald ballad. My daughter smiled, and I called out, "Urban!" The singing ceased, and there was no response to my cry. "Come," said my daughter, and led me around the dry fountain to an alley of cypress trees which opened toward a section of the mansion beyond the court.

An open door at the end of this alley admitted us to a circular chamber, very lofty, evidently an audience room, deserted like the rest, on one side of which, on a *daïs*, stood a marble seat with arms, covered with cobwebs.

"Ah! Look!" said my daughter, and pointed to an open doorway on the opposite side of the room.



*The Solitary Figure Behind the Spider's Web*

The doorway was barred from top to bottom and from side to side with a single monstrous spider's web. We stood before it and looked through. Seated beside a table in a little room with a high window barred likewise with a cobweb was the figure of our friend, the governor of Oogh.

His head was resting mournfully on his hand, and he was staring vacantly at the floor. His hair was long and powdered with dust; his beard had grown to a great length; but he had no eyebrows. His hands and clothing were white with dust, and there was around his neck, in striking contrast, a gold chain, of very fine gold and delicate workmanship.

"Urban!" I cried. "We are here!"

He did not move. I called his name again, but he seemed not to hear. He did not move nor speak. I pushed briskly against the cobweb, but it held like wire; I could not break through, though I dashed against it with all my strength. I tried to cut it with a sharp knife which I wore under my smock, but it was no use; the cobweb held, and the blade was broken.

We remained for a moment, peering in at our friend, uncertain what to do. Who could have been the author of this witchery? I remembered the name which had occurred on one of the ballad singers' sheets. I gave a last look at the silent and motionless figure within, and led my daughter back to the court of the dry fountain. There she sat down on the rim of the empty basin, and looked up at the sky

as if listening. A faint sound, as of singing at a distance, seemed to float down to us.

"Just as I thought," said my daughter. "It will be best for me to remain here. I think some information will come to me here, if I wait. Do you go down into the city, father, and seek what you may find there. I will wait here until you return. Don't be uneasy, father; I shall not be lonesome." And she laughed, as if at some joke.

I did not understand her purpose, and I refused to leave her; but she insisted, and I gave in at last. She always had her way.

I left her, and set forth alone to obtain such information as I could. I was passing out through the ruinous gateway into the street, when I heard, or fancied I heard, from the direction of the house, the voices of the three blind ballad singers, in one of their songs; but when I stopped to listen I could hear them no longer, and I concluded that I had been mistaken.

I reached the market place, and stood for a moment behind an awning, debating whether I might put a question regarding Babadag the Tailor. I was still uncertain what to do, when a slight commotion among the people attracted my notice. I looked out from my concealment, and saw, approaching from the next corner, the boy whom I had found beside the wayside well.

### *The Prince Watches the People's Behavior Toward the Boy*

His face was dark with a sort of settled gloom. He walked slowly, and as he came on the people made way for

him and stood whispering in groups and glancing at him furtively over their shoulders. He paused at one of the stalls and picking up some dates looked at the vender, timidly and appealingly, as if about to speak; but the vender sidled away from him toward the nearest group, and the boy put down the fruit, sighed, and went on.

He passed the place of my concealment, and by this time tears were beginning to trickle down his cheeks. But he held his head proudly, and looking neither to right nor to left passed out of sight around the next corner.

I followed him, hoping for some light upon the general mystery. I followed him across the city, through many streets, wondering why it was that a boy so gentle and so beautiful should seem to inspire everywhere a kind of mild and listless aversion. At one place a child ran up to him and tugged at his garments, and the boy's face lighted up with pleasure; but the child's mother pulled her infant away in a hurry, and the boy went on, more sadly than before.

He came to a street in which, for the space of a single block, the shops and houses were evidently deserted; and in the middle of this block, before a shop with broken windows, deserted apparently like the rest, the boy stopped, and pushing open the front door, went in.

I came up quickly, and peeping in at the same door saw a vacant room within, in which remnants of old merchandise were lying about in disorder, and dirt and refuse lay everywhere on the floor. I went in quietly and crossed the room to a door at the rear, and opening it on a crack saw the boy stooping down in a paved yard. I heard the boy speak,

without hearing what he said, and saw him descend by some means into the ground and disappear.

I ran to the spot and knelt down beside an iron grating, some three feet square, which I found there in the pavement. I heard from below a rumble, succeeded by a clatter, and then there was silence. Laying down my pack on the ground I pulled at the grating, and found that it rose on hinges, like a trapdoor. I opened it, and saw beneath it a ladder. I stepped on the top rung, and went down.

*The Man with the Ball in the Underground Alley*

At the bottom I found myself at one end of a dimly lighted room, very long and very narrow, like an enclosed alley; and near by was the boy, and beside him a grown man, both intent on something at the other end of the room. The man was swinging in his right hand a large wooden ball, and as I watched him he cried out, laughing cheerily:

"Never mind, Figli! This time I'll make a strike! Only forty-seven more to make! Now watch!"

He hurled the ball from him along the floor, and it rolled swiftly to the far end of the room, where it crashed in among ten large wooden bottles, standing upright on the floor. He was playing tenpins.

"Oh!" cried the boy called Figli. "Only seven!"

"Never mind, never mind," said the Bowler, cheerfully, and ran up the alley and set up the pins, and then ran back with the ball, in great haste. As he came back, he appeared to look directly at me, but gave no sign of having seen me. I



scanned his face closely. He was blind. His hair and beard were black, and he had no eyebrows.

The boy flung out his hands as if in despair, and cried:

"It's no use! You can't do it! Forty-seven strikes to make by midnight! Oh, he'll give you to Goolk the Spider! What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Perhaps I can help you," said I, coming forward.

The boy sprang up, and the Blind Bowler wheeled round toward me.

"Oh! it's you," said the boy named Figli. "What can a peddler do against the Eyebrow?"

"Who is it?" said the Blind Bowler.

"It's a stranger with eyebrows," said Figli, "who was kind to me to-day."

The Blind Bowler sent a ball spinning up the alley, and all the ten pins fell down with a clatter.

"A strike!" cried Figli, joyfully.

"We'll do it yet!" said the Bowler. "Only forty-six more! Never give up! Keep everlastingly at it, that's my motto!" And he ran after the ball, set up the pins, and ran back, ready to throw again.

"If he has eyebrows," said he, panting and wiping his forehead, "he must have a will of his own; and it must be a good will, or else he wouldn't have been kind to you."

He rolled the ball again, knocking down only six.

"Better luck next time!" he cried, and darted up the alley. "Never say die, and keep everlastingly at it, that's the motto!"

"My boy," said I, "I beg you to trust me, and to tell me who you are, and why—"

"A strike!" cried the Blind Bowler. "Only forty-five to make by midnight! Trust him, Figli! His voice is honest. I think he is the one we have been waiting for. Trust him!"

"It's hard for me to tell you," said the boy, "it's too—"

"I'll tell you!" cried the Blind Bowler, running down the alley. "His name is Figli Babadag. Does that tell you everything?"

"No, nothing," said I.

"Eight down that time!" cried the Bowler. "Never say die! He's the son of Babadag the Tailor. Now do you know?"

"No," said I.

"Then I must tell you," said the Blind Bowler. "It is Babadag who rules the city; don't you know that? Master of black secrets is Babadag, and lord of the Eyebrow; and his anger is terrible. He has put the golden chain about the Governor's neck and shut him up in the Cobweb Room. He has drawn the wills from out of the brains of all our people, by plucking out their eyebrows, so that in all the city there are but two wills only, one bad and one good: the will of Babadag and the will of his little son. Nine down that time! Never give up!"

"Oh!" cried Figli. "I want my father to be good! I want him to be poor and good like the others! If I could only make him good!"

"Only one way to do that!" said the Blind Bowler, half-way down the alley. "He is lord of the Eyebrow, and in

the Eyebrow lies his power. But the hairs of his eyebrows are no ordinary hairs; they are of the family of gray snakes that live in the lake Siskratoum, and there is no one to cut them, even if there were a blade sharp enough; and they must be cut by the hand of love, and there is no one here that loves him, but his son. There is not one but trembles at his name, and even at the name of Figli his son;—there is scarcely one who dares brush against the boy in the street, for fear of what power may lie in the eyebrows of the boy, and for fear of his father's malice."

"They won't speak to me!" cried Figli. "They're afraid of me! And I've done them no harm! I only want to be friends with them!"

"You see he's all alone. He hates his riches; he wants to be poor and simple, like the others."

"And what about yourself?" said I.

"Ah!" cried the Blind Bowler. "Only six down that time! Not so easy, when you've no eyes to see with! But keep everlastingly at it, that's the word! What did you say?"

"What about yourself?" said I.

"Oh, me! I helped the governor fight this Babadag, and we lost; and for that the powerful one put out my eyes, and the eyes of my three brothers as well, for nothing but because they were my brothers; three ballad singers—"

"Yes!" said I. "I have seen them."

"Ridiculous fellows, but no harm in them! And because it was my pleasure in former times to play at bowling, old Babadag placed me here, under my shop, to bowl a

thousand strikes, if I could, by midnight of this very day; and if not, to take my place in the web with Goolk the Spider. Those ballad singers, my brothers, they would like to help me if they could, and perhaps they will yet, who knows? Aha! Another strike! I'll do it yet!"

"It's no use," said Figli. "The time's too short. And I can't save him. Oh, if you could help us, peddler! But you mustn't do my father any harm!"

"My boy," said I, "I am a friend of the enchanted governor, and I will do my best to help you. And perhaps the three blind ballad singers mean to help too. I think they do. Will you take me to your father?"

The boy started in alarm. "You are very brave, peddler," said he. "What do you say?" he asked of the Blind Bowler.

"I say yes!" cried the Bowler. "There is hope in this stranger. I think he's the one we've been waiting for. My brothers have been on the lookout for him. They'll help too. Trust him!"

"Do you know any stories?" said the boy.

I smiled. "A few, I dare say," said I.

"My father is a lover of tales. It's his one weakness. It will be safer for you if you can amuse him with tales, and the longer they are the better."

"The wine, if he offers you any," said the Blind Bowler, "will be drugged; that much is sure. Take care. And do not let yourself be touched by Goolk the Spider."

"Come," said I. "There is not a moment to be lost."



*The Prince Sets Out for His Encounter with Babadag the Tailor*

I hastened to the ladder, followed by the boy, and we began to go up. The tenpins fell down with a clatter, and as I reached the grating overhead I heard the voice of the Blind Bowler from below, crying out cheerily, "Four down! Never mind! Keep everlastingly at it!"

In the paved yard I slung my pack on my back again, and followed the boy into the street. It was beginning to grow dark, and I thought anxiously of my daughter; but I could not go back to her yet. During our walk the boy spoke only once, and then he said:

"You must not do my father any harm. I love my father. I want him to be good, like the others, but I should die—I should die!—if he came to any harm."

I did not reply, but followed for half an hour through streets which were now almost empty of people. We entered at last a street narrower than the others, paved with cobblestones and without a sidewalk, and stopped before a shop over whose door, by way of a sign, hung a yardstick and a pair of shears. It seemed a mean enough abode for the ruler of the city, but Figli, without hesitating, opened the door and went in. The room inside was dark, but I could see a tailor's bench and implements, and a disorderly array of half-finished garments, covered with dust. The boy opened a door at the rear, and I followed him along a dark passage to another door, which Figli threw open to a flood of light.

*Babadag the Tailor, Goolk the Spider, and the Eight Tailors*

We were standing in a magnificent apartment, paved with colored marble, hung and spread with soft rugs, and lit with hundreds of tapers. At the left, near the wall, was sitting an old man, and behind his chair, from ceiling to floor, was a gigantic spider's web, which glistened like silver in the candlelight. In the center of this web was a great green spider, with five or six small black spiders about him. Against the opposite wall, on a tailor's bench, eight men, totally without eyebrows, were sitting cross-legged, each bending over a bowl held on his knees, filled with what looked like shreds of hair, and engaged in some kind of work with tiny knitting needles.

The old man's gross and heavy body was clothed in a gorgeous robe of pale yellow silk, like that which the boy had thrown in the mud, but embroidered with spider's webs of spun gold, and studded with rubies and amethysts. His face, a rather jovial face, was covered with gray hair, which hung over his breast, and his eyes shone like sparks behind a pair of the shaggiest eyebrows I had ever seen. He gazed at me calmly, and held out a hand to his son.

The boy went to him, and Babadag the Tailor put an arm about him and said, with very obvious tenderness:

"My boy, you are late. And your robe and hat! Where are they?"

The boy threw himself on his knees beside his father, and cried, "Oh, father! I couldn't wear them any longer. I couldn't! They're hateful! I don't want to be dressed in



"You are welcome, master peddler," said Babadag







silk! I want to be poor like the others! I can't wear them any longer, I can't, I can't!"

The old man smiled kindly. "Never mind, my son, never mind. I'll not scold you. We'll think no more about it. Who is the visitor you have brought with you?"

"It's a peddler," said Figli, standing up. "I don't know his name; a peddler I met by chance, and I'd like you to buy me something from his pack."

I stepped forward, made my bow, and dropped my pack to the floor.

"You are welcome, master peddler," said Babadag.

The green spider gave a sharp twitch, which set the whole web quivering.

"Quiet, Goolk!" said Babadag.

The eight men on the tailor's bench stopped their work, and said: "Welcome, master peddler!"

"Knit your brows!" said Babadag, angrily, and the eight men hurriedly resumed their knitting.

I opened my pack and began to take out some toys.

"Presently, presently, peddler," said Babadag, stopping me. "Your face is dark, stranger. A little more, and it would have been black."

"Yes, very dark," said the eight men, stopping their work again.

"Knit your brows!" thundered Babadag. "Accursed dogs, be silent!—A dark stranger, who wears eyebrows in the city of Oogh! A thing of interest! I would gladly know who you are and what brings you here."

I was prepared with my story, and I answered promptly.

"Magnificence," said I, "I am a peddler, and my name is Nobbud Bald-er-Dash. If the ear of graciousness will incline to me, I will tell an amusing tale concerning myself, and at some length."

"A tale!" cried Babadag. "You must know, honest Bald-er-Dash, that I am a lover of tales. A weakness! I confess it. Come! We will make a night of it. Goolk," said he, rising, "come hither!"

The green spider sped down the web to the floor, and ran up the old man's yellow silk robe, and came to a stop on his breast, beside his beard.

"It is the hour of the evening repast," continued Babadag, stroking the spider with his finger, "and I invite you to sit down with me. A guest who has a tale to tell! It is good fortune, no less! Come, Figli, my son, we will listen to the excellent Bald-er-Dash while we dine."

### *The Prince Dines with Babadag the Tailor*

He pulled aside a curtain in the wall, and leaving the eight men at their work, we passed, all three, into an open court, hung about with lanterns of colored glass, and odorous with flowers. Under an awning was a small table, set for two. It was now dark, and the lanterns shed a soft glow on the silver and glass of the table. Servants appeared and laid a place for myself, and the meal commenced.

"You are wondering, Bald-er-Dash," said Babadag, "who the eight men are whom we have just left. They are tailors, known among us as the Knitters of Eyebrows. They are knitting for me, out of the eyebrows which my

good people have been so kind as to give me, a garment known as the Cloak of Wills, which will, when finished, complete the mastery of the fortunate person who wears it. Try a little of this wine, my good Bald-er-Dash; you will find it excellent."

I pretended to drink the wine, but I was able, while Babadag's attention was fixed on his plate, to spill a good deal of it on the floor.

"I am anxious to hear your story," said the old man. "The singers who sometimes entertain me at my meals are late to-day, and we will not wait for them. Bald-er-Dash, my good fellow, let me hear your tale."

At this moment voices were heard from the shadows, and three men came running toward the table, crying out boisterously.

"Good news!" they were shouting. "We're going to marry! She's promised! She'll marry the one you choose, tra la! She'll marry the one you choose!"

### *The Three Blind Ballad Singers Once More*

They began to sing, at the top of their voices. I started in surprise. It was the three blind ballad singers. "O-o-oh!" they sang:

"She wanted to marry us all, she said,  
But that wouldn't do, no never,  
No never, no never, no, no!  
From suitors a dozen,  
Not counting a cousin  
And two or three uncles or so,  
She'd freely and frankly, firmly and fairly,

## SOLARIO THE TAILOR

Flatly and finally fled!  
 For never a one could sing. not one,  
 Not a line, not a note, not a thing, not one,  
 And she, she said, if she must be wed,  
 A singer she'd have, or she'd have none,  
 For really she'd almost rather be dead  
 If she couldn't be uninterruptedly fed  
     On an endless tonic  
     Of scales harmonic  
 In every possible key,  
     An infinite series, never finished,  
 Of chords with all the sevenths diminished,  
 And all the intervals less than minor,—  
 Surely nothing could be diviner,  
 Nothing! nothing at all, said she:  
 And after breakfast a quaver hemi,  
 And after dinner a quaver demi,  
 And after supper a quaver semi,  
 And in between, for ever and ever,  
 Every possible kind of shake!  
 The fact of the matter is, you see,  
     She'd made up her mind, beyond mistake,  
 To offer her hand to one of we!  
     But which should it be?  
     Which one of the three?  
 And what of the two who would have to go?  
     What about them? she said; that's it!  
     She didn't approve the idea a bit.  
 Those other two she could never forget,—  
 Just think of them out in the cold and wet!  
 Just think of their terrible, terrible woe!  
 She wanted to marry, and yet, and yet,  
     She'd never be happy, no never,  
     No never, no never, no, no!"



"Silence, fools," said Babadag, laughing. "We are about to listen to a tale,—a tale from Bald-er-Dash the peddler. Will you proceed now, excellent peddler?"

"Willingly," said I.

At the sound of my voice, the three blind men cried out "Aha!" and broke into a fresh song:

"The peddler and the peddler's maid, oh fair as milk was she,  
And she promised on her honor she would marry one of three,—"

"Silence, rascals!" said Babadag.

I was becoming, all this while, more and more restless, for I had no doubt that all this talk of marriage had reference to my own daughter. I wondered bitterly what mischief she had been up to during my absence.

"These rascals," said Babadag, still laughing, "sometimes I am minded to put them to death. I don't know really why I let them live. Now then, excellent one, let us hear the tale."

I bowed, and while the repast proceeded, and the three ballad singers remained standing behind our chairs, I related to Babadag, as follows,

#### THE STORY OF NOBBUD BALD-ER-DASH THE PEDDLER

"In the course of my wanderings," I began, "I arrived one day at a spring in the wilderness, beside which were encamped a company of—"

*"I think," said Solario, interrupting himself, "that I cannot conscientiously repeat this story, because—"*

*"Oh, please!" said Bojohn. "We'd like to hear it."*

*"No," said Solario, "I couldn't, conscientiously, because there is not a word of truth in the story, and I do not wish to tell anything which is not strictly true."*

During my tale (said the Prince) I pretended now and then to take a sip of wine, and to grow drowsy, so that toward the end I seemed to have difficulty in keeping awake. When I had concluded, Babadag laughed and said, "I thank you, peddler. Never in my life have I heard such a tissue of—er—amusing facts. Some more wine, peddler."

I pretended to sip the wine again, and let my head fall forward on my breast, and roused myself as if with a great effort.

"I am something," said Babadag, appearing to take no notice of my drowsiness, "of a teller of tales myself. I will tell you in return a story, and when I have finished you shall tell me another, if you know any, as you undoubtedly do."

Thereupon he commenced a long and detailed story; and I could see that as he proceeded he was watching me from the corner of his eye. He had not spun out his tale very far when my eyes closed and my head nodded; and after an apparent effort to arouse myself I let my head fall forward on the table and lie there motionless.

Babadag instantly stopped, raised my head gently, and laying it back against my chair shook me roughly, but with no effect.

"Send in the accursed dogs," said he in a fierce whisper.

I was aware, in a moment, that the eight tailors were standing around me.

"The eyebrows!" said Babadag, and the tailors bent over me and began to pluck at my eyebrows with instruments of some sort.

"Oh, father, father," said Figli, "please don't!"

"Be still, my son," said Babadag.

*The Magic Doublet Protects the Prince Against the Knitters of Eyebrows and Against Goolk the Spider*

I laughed inwardly, for I was sure that, under the protection of my doublet, my eyebrows would reappear as fast as they could be plucked out. And indeed, from the snort of rage given by Babadag, I soon knew that my eyebrows were safe. I could hear the eight tailors whispering together, as if in dismay.

"Goolk!" said Babadag, in the same angry whisper, "sting me this false peddler!"

"No, no, father," said Figli. "Not that, oh, please!"

I shivered a little, for I confess that the thought of the spider was horrifying to me. I waited anxiously, not daring to open my eyelids even a trifle. I assure you it was all I could do to remain still. There was silence, and in the midst of it I felt a tickling on my left cheek, and then a kind of pin-prick there, and I knew that the spider had stung me.

"Back, Goolk!" said Babadag. "Now, false peddler that you are, be no longer either a prince or a peddler, but a spider,—a black spider!—and take your place with Goolk in the web! Change!"

I felt no change, and I heard another snort of rage from Babadag. "Some charm!" he muttered. "Some charm

protects him! Let us see what charm this lying stranger carries upon him."

I felt that my smock was being lifted from my breast, and I heard a kind of gasp from Babadag. "The doublet!" he said. "It is plain! Off with the doublet!" And immediately fingers were at my breast, trying to unbutton the doublet.

But they could not unbutton it. Not a button would come through its hole.

"Fetch me a pair of shears, rascals," said Babadag, and in a moment I knew that shears were snapping away at my doublet. But it was no use; the blade would not cut, neither the thread of the buttons nor the cloth; they held like iron at every point. I heard the shears drop to the floor.

"The Shears of Sharpness! Bring me the Shears of Sharpness!" said Babadag. "Nothing else will cut this doublet."

I heard a chuckle, and the voice of one of the ballad singers said, "The Shears of Sharpness, brothers!" And there was another chuckle.

"What!" said Babadag. "You laugh, rascals? You dare to laugh?"

"The Shears of Sharpness!" said the voice of one of the ballad singers. "Where are the Shears of Sharpness, brothers?" And at this there was a very considerable tittering.

"Ask the fair lady, brother," said the voice of another of the ballad singers.



"She knows! The wonderful lady!" said the voice of the third.

"Ineffable scoundrels!" said Babadag. "Have you stolen my Shears?"

"No, no! Only borrowed them! What harm in that?" said the ballad singers.

"Return them to me at once!" said Babadag.

I could hear the ballad singers chuckling together again. "We would, we would," said one of them, "we meant to, but—"

"But what, beast?"

"She has them," said one of the three.

"The most wonderful of women," said another.

"She who swore she would marry one of us," said the third.

*The Prince's Daughter Has Beguiled the Shears of Sharpness from the Ballad Singers*

My daughter! My own daughter! She had beguiled the Shears from these foolish vagabonds! Or had they let her have the Shears for some purpose of their own—to help their brother, say? I was quite bewildered.

"Oh, that I should let such scoundrels live!" said Babadag, fiercely. "Where is this woman?"

"But she wouldn't marry us unless we gave her the Shears," said one of the ballad singers. "No harm in that!"

"No harm in that, surely!" said the other two.

"Where is this woman?" said Babadag again.

"We left her," said one of the others, "by the dry fountain at the governor's palace."

"Accursed," said Babadag, evidently addressing the eight tailors, "pick up this peddler and follow me. We must find the Shears. You, imbeciles that you are, I will deal with you afterward. Goolk, back to your web!"

I could not see what became of Goolk, but I knew that the eight tailors were lifting me from my chair, and I felt myself being borne away.

"Oh, father!" cried Figli. "You mustn't! Please let the poor man go, oh please!"

"My son," said Babadag, in the voice of tenderness with which he always addressed his son, "he is my enemy. I must have him in my power. Accursed doublet!"

### *A Light Flickers in the Dark Shop*

In a moment I was aware that we were in the street, and I opened my eyelids a trifle. The moon was shining. I saw Babadag starting on before, with the three ballad singers at his back. Behind, the eight tailors were holding me in a sitting posture between them. I could see the shop door, without moving my head, and as we started I beheld Figli, coming from the door, in the act of stowing away something, I could not see what, in the bosom of his shirt. The shop was dark, but as Figli closed the door behind him I noticed, flickering from within, a tiny flame of light which had not been there before. I remarked that the boy's face was very pale in the moonlight.

We came, after a long journey through deserted streets,

to the little hill which led up to the governor's palace. We entered the ruined park, and crossed it to the mansion. Babadag opened the door, and the company paused inside, listening. All was silent. I had an impulse to shout, in order to warn my daughter; but I knew that that would be fatal, and I continued to lie inert and speechless in the arms of the tailors. I risked opening my eyes from time to time, and I saw that Babadag was leading the way from room to room, all dark except for moonlight here and there upon the floors, and that he came at last, followed by all the others, into the court of the dry fountain; and there the eight tailors laid me down on the ground. My heart almost stopped beating, for fear that my daughter should be there.

"Vile rascals," said Babadag, "you have deceived me! There is no woman here."

"Astonishing!" said one of the ballad singers. "Not here! Who would have thought it?"

"I doubt that she was ever here," said Babadag. "Wait!"

I saw him go off down the alley of cypress trees toward the Cobweb Room, no doubt to assure himself that his prisoner was safe, or else to seek the woman there. As soon as he was gone, I felt a hand on my arm, and the voice of Figli whispered in my ear, "Are you awake?" and I pressed his hand in answer.

*The Prince's Daughter Is Gone, and the Prince Makes a Dash for Liberty*

The eight tailors were sitting on the rim of the fountain's basin, mopping their foreheads and panting, and the blind

men were standing near them. I measured with my eye the distance to the door from which I had come, and gave a sudden spring toward it which carried me nearly there; and I was off and away, before the eight tailors realized what had happened.

I scoured swiftly and silently through the dark rooms in all directions, listening now and then for sounds of pursuit. But I heard nothing, and I began to whisper my daughter's name from time to time. In a room far distant from the court, to which I presently came, I found the door at the opposite side closed, which in that house of open doors struck me as being odd. A broad band of moonlight lay across the floor, and in the dim light I could see the furnishings of a kitchen. I approached the opposite door and opened it cautiously, thinking to go through; but I looked into a cupboard, hung with pots and pans, and there on the floor of the cupboard was sitting my daughter, calmly eating a fig.

She looked up at me with a merry laugh, and sprang to her feet.

"There are very good fig trees in the park," said she. "Will you have one of these? No? You've been gone a long time. I heard some people going through the house, and I thought I had better wait in here. I'm going to be married!"

"Come," said I, "we've no time for jesting."

"But it's the best joke!" said my daughter. "When I think how I played on those half-wits! I've never had such sport in my life! I promised to marry one of them,





"Beauty in tatters!" said Babadag the Tailor



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if they'd choose which—do you remember the three ballad singers?"

"And you have the Shears of Sharpness," said I.

"How do you know that?" said she. "They're simply mad! And I wouldn't promise them anything unless they gave me the Shears. And they did! And I promised! And now you've got to get me out of it. Here are the Shears. Take them."

"I suspect, my dear," said I, taking the Shears from her, "that these three imbeciles meant that you should have the Shears all the time, and they've been making a bit of a fool of you. But there's no time for talking. Hurry!"

I stepped quickly toward the door, and as I reached it it was blocked by a huge dark figure. It was Babadag.

"Not so fast, peddler," said he; and then he saw my daughter, who was standing in the band of moonlight, most fairylike and beautiful. He brushed past me and stopped before her, gazing at her in astonishment and admiration.

"Beauty in tatters!" he said. "No wonder that even blind men are conquered. You make me forget the Shears. Surely there is no woman in Oogh so beautiful. Will you look on me kindly? I am powerful, and I offer you a share of my power. It is Babadag who speaks."

He held out his hand to her, and she shrank away in horror. "No, no!" she screamed. "Father!"

Babadag turned swiftly, and at that moment I sprang upon him; but the old man snatched forth a knife, and as I caught and held the arm which was lifted to strike, a

small dark figure darted in from the doorway and flung something over the old man's neck from behind.

*Babadag the Tailor Is Conquered by His Little Son*

The knife dropped from Babadag's hand. He swayed, tottered, collapsed, and fell full length on the floor, and lay motionless on his back in the strip of moonlight. The little dark figure knelt beside him. It was Figli.

"Oh, father! Oh, father!" he cried. "I'm sorry, sorry! I had to do it! I couldn't let you kill him! It can't go on any longer! The eyebrows must be cut, father! It's only to make you like the others! We'll both be happier, oh, indeed we will! It's only because I love you, father!"

"I didn't think you would have done this, Figli, my son," said the old man, gently. "You have put me in the power of my enemy. Ah, Figli, my son, my son!"

"I know it, I know it," sobbed the boy, "but the lady will give the Shears to me, and I will cut the eyebrows myself, with my own hand. The peddler will do you no harm. You'll be glad, father, afterward, indeed you will."

"Ah, my son, my son! I wouldn't have thought it of you," said the old man, still gently.

I knelt beside him, and found around his neck a noose of the slenderest thread, extremely tough; and the end of this thread the boy was holding in his hand. I took it from him and looked at him inquiringly.

"Yes," said the boy, "it was spun by Goolk the Spider, and there is no will can stand against it, not even my father's. It's the thing that made him first able to pluck out



the eyebrows of the people. I stole it as we left the shop to-night. You won't do him any harm, will you?"

I stood up, keeping the end of the thread in my hand. A patter of running feet sounded from the next room, and the eight tailors crowded in at the doorway. They rushed to their master, and wailed and wrung their hands. One of them drew a pair of shears, and began to snip away at the thread, but it was plain that no ordinary blade would cut it, and the tailor gave it up, and the other seven wailed louder than before.

"Lift up this knave," I said, "and follow me."

The eight tailors obeyed instantly, and our party started back to the court of the dry fountain. I walked beside the body of Babadag, keeping close hold of the thread. When we reached the court, the three ballad singers were sitting calmly on the rim of the basin, singing softly to themselves. My daughter, ever incorrigible, greeted them with an amused laugh, and they crowded around her, each trying to elbow the others out of the way. At my command, the eight tailors laid Babadag down on his back in the dry basin. I then gave the end of the thread into the hand of my daughter, and left them.

I ran down the cypress alley to the deserted audience chamber. I looked through the cobweb at Urban, and by the dim light of the high window saw him sitting there motionless as stone, in the same attitude as before.

"I am here!" I cried, but he neither moved nor spoke. I applied the Shears, and in a moment the cobweb was hanging in shreds, and I was standing beside my friend. I

tried to pull him up, but I could not budge him. I lifted the golden chain from around his neck, and dropped it to the floor. Immediately he raised his head, stretched his arms, looked up at me as if awaking from a dream, and sprang to his feet.

"Prince!" he cried, and threw his arms about me in a transport of joy.

I calmed him, and when he had recovered himself he said, "What of Babadag?"

"He is in the court at this moment," said I, "bound fast."

"Good news indeed!" he cried. "Let us go!"

*The Governor, Being Released, Beholds the Prince's Daughter*

We sped back to the court, and when Urban beheld my daughter he scattered the blind men right and left and clasped her hand in his. I took from her the end of the thread and knelt in the basin beside the huge body of Babadag, and gazed down into his eyes, glittering up at me in the moonlight through their tangle of hair. I drew the Shears."

"No, no!" cried the boy. "You must not! Give me the Shears! I must do it, for you do not love him, and I do! Only the hand of love! Give me the Shears!"

"No time for talking!" I cried. "This is no child's play. Work for a man! And I trust no one but myself! Now for the shearing of the Eyebrow!"

The boy shrieked, as if in despair, and with a mighty snap

of the Shears I cut in among the hairs of Babadag's left eyebrow.

*The Shearing of the Eyebrow*

A spout of yellow smoke shot upward from his eyebrow, and whirled and spread outward in a cloud, thick, sickening, blinding, pierced with wriggling pencils of light, as if tiny snakes had been set riotously free. It covered us both, so that he was suddenly hidden from my sight. I gasped and choked. My eyes smarted with pain. I snapped blindly away at him through the smoke with my Shears, resolved not to be foiled. There was a sharp crack, as of the snapping of a whip; the Shears had cut,—alas, alas!—not the Eyebrow, but the thread around Babadag's neck! Instantly the Shears were wrenched from my hand, I did not know how; and I felt them ripping through my smock, and I knew that some injury had been done to my doublet. A terrible voice bellowed, "Hither, accursed dogs, and bind me this peddler!" And the next moment I was lying on my back, with the thread fastened securely about my neck; and my strength was suddenly gone, and the smoke began to clear away.

I saw the old man put his arm tenderly about his son, and heard him say, "It's all right now, my boy. I am not angry. You have put your father in great danger, but not from malice; I know it well. Don't be grieved; we'll laugh about it together, hereafter. All's well again. Come, Figli, my son. Rascals, follow me!"

He stalked away with his son down the cypress alley, and the eight tailors lifted me and bore me after, followed by my daughter and my friend. I looked for the three blind ballad singers, but they were gone. I was in terrible danger, and I bitterly regretted my haste in refusing the Shears to the boy.

*The Prince before the Seat of Judgment*

In the circular audience chamber they laid me down upon the floor. Babadag, grotesque and somber in the darkness, seated himself in the marble armchair on the daïs; and at the same time I heard, or fancied I heard, the voices of the ballad singers, afar off somewhere in the palace, singing away at one of their songs.

"Pluck out the hairs!" said Babadag.

"No, no!" said Figli, lying on the step of the daïs at his father's feet.

"Quick, scoundrels!" said Babadag; and the eight tailors, kneeling around me, plucked out with tiny instruments all the hairs of my eyebrows, by the roots. Then, at a sign from their master, they stood me on my feet and removed the spider's thread from around my neck. My strength returned, and I found myself able to stand alone.

"Gone is your power, maker of fables!" said Babadag. "The doublet is worthless. See!" And he held up what appeared to be the thread of a button. My smock was in strips, and the doublet was exposed to view. One button was missing. What had become of it? Babadag exhibited only the thread.



"Dog of a peddler," said he, "it is your due that I give you to Goolk the Spider for his web."

"Spare him! Spare him!" said Figli, in a kind of moan, rocking himself back and forth on the step of the daïs.

"But Babadag is merciful," went on the old man, "and loves a tale; and never have I heard so amusing a tissue of lies as that tale of Bald-er-Dash the Peddler. For that, and for the pleasure I shall have in repeating that tale hereafter, I spare you. You are harmless. Go! and as you have chosen to darken your skin with juices, let it be darker still. Go! and be you henceforth as black as night. I will lead you to the palace gate, and speed you, with your daughter and your friend, on your journey away from Oogh. Return no more, peddler, for the web awaits you, and Goolk the Spider longs for a brother."

He stepped down from his seat, and we others followed him in silence. I was conscious of no will to resist him further. We came to the court of the dry fountain, and there my daughter looked into my face in the moonlight. She screamed.

We followed mournfully through the dark rooms, and came out on the steps before the palace; and there we saw a sight both terrible and beautiful.

### *The Doom of the City of Oogh*

The city was in flames. From every roof, as far as we could see, rose sheets of fire, and sparks showered upward into a pall of black smoke; and as we watched, new tongues

of flame blazed up from quarters dark before. The city was doomed.

"Ah!" said Babadag with a groan. "My city, my city!"

"What have I done? What have I done?" cried Figli, wringing his hands in anguish.

"You, my son? What have you to do with this?" said his father, never taking his eyes from the burning city.

"It's my work!" cried the boy. "But I never dreamed of this! I set fire to the shop, our shop, before I left,—to burn up all the black secrets in my father's house, and to kill Goolk the Spider, to kill him, kill him, so that he would never get the Blind Bowler, nor any one else! So that all the old riches and wickedness might be burned up forever! And now, and now, I haven't destroyed the Eyebrow, and I've burned up the city! Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"My son, my son," said Babadag, quietly, never taking his eyes from the burning city.

I recalled now the spark of fire I had seen through the window as we had left the tailor's shop that night.

The flames of the furnace below us shot higher and higher, and spread wider and wider in every direction.

"The Book of the Shavian Magic," said Babadag, as if to himself. "That must be saved."

He ran down the steps and started across the park.

"Father! father! where are you going?" cried Figli, but his father paid no attention. The boy sped after him, and we others followed.

*The Tailor's Son Follows Him into the Burning City*

Out at the park gate and down the hill ran Babadag, and straight into the blazing ruin which was once his city. Nothing could stop him. Flames roared on both sides of him; sparks showered around him; walls toppled behind him; smoke swallowed him; but he kept on. We paused in terror; only his little boy continued to follow him, calling to him to come back.

A wall of flame shot out behind the running boy, and a house fell crashing behind him into the street; and father and boy were no longer to be seen.

I turned away, and leaving the eight tailors wailing, I made my way with my daughter and my friend back to the palace; and there, on the palace steps, we sat all night long, watching the great fire burn itself out.

The sun rose on a city of smoking ruins; and with its first rays there came plodding in through the park gate a blind man, who called aloud as he reached the steps. It was the Blind Bowler.

"I am here," said I, "Figli's friend; and my daughter too, and the governor whom once you tried to help. What news?"

"Ten strikes still lacking!" said the Blind Bowler. "But it makes no difference now. Figli has saved me, and all the rest of us too. Come with me."

He led us out into the street and down into the city, where the homeless people were standing as if bewildered. We came into the street where once had been the shop of

Babadag the Tailor. It was there no longer; but by some chance there yet remained the wall which held the doorway, and above it the yardstick and the shears; and across the sill lay Figli, on his face.

*The Boy Is Found on the Sill of His Ruined Home, Alive*

My daughter ran to him and put her arm about him. He was alive, and he shook his head and moaned, "I want my father. I want my father."

"Yes," said she, "your father. Is he—?"

"In there," he whispered.

"Ah! He is—"

"Under the wall. I saw it fall on him. He is in there."

"Oh, my poor boy!"

"I killed him. And all I wanted was to make him good."

She put her arm under him and raised him, and he stood up.

"Come with me, dear boy," said she.

"I can't go away. I can't leave him in there. Can't you help me to see him?"

"Not now, but later, perhaps. Come with me now, and we will talk of him together."

"He loved me, too. He did, didn't he? And I killed him."

"Yes, he did, he did. But you mustn't say that you—"

"It wasn't because I meant to harm him, was it? I wouldn't have harmed him, would I?"

"No, no. It was just because you loved him, that was all."



"Yes, that was it. That was all it was."

He suffered her to lead him away, and he said nothing more, but repeated to himself, once or twice, "That was all it was."

On my part, I spoke at length to the Blind Bowler, and gave him many directions; and he, having received at my hands a purse of gold, for use as I had instructed him, went his way; and we others then walked slowly back to the palace, where we rested on the steps, waiting, and Figli fell asleep with his head on my daughter's shoulder.

When the sun was high in the east, people began to come in at the park gate, and the Blind Bowler, his first duty done, joined us on the palace steps. More people came, and the park began to be filled with them; they came before long in a steady stream, and at length the park was crowded with a great multitude, from the steps to the gate.

At a signal from myself, my party on the steps arose, and I addressed the people of Oogh. I told them who I was, and how my skin had come to be black; I told them that I was going away, and that their governor was resolved to go with me; that I meant to leave a governor who would help them rebuild their city, and lead them in the ways of goodness and mercy; that the person whom I had selected for that office was the boy known as Figli Babadag, whose soundness of heart was worth to them more than the wisdom of years; and that such wisdom as was necessary would be supplied by him who was called the Blind Bowler, a man who had known how to be cheerful under affliction. And I

asked them to say whether they would have the boy Figli for their governor, and the Blind Bowler for his aide.

A shout of approval went up from the multitude.

"And will you," said I, turning to Figli, "lead these people in the ways of goodness and mercy, and help them to forget?"

"If you think I can," said Figli, standing up very straight, "I will try."

"And will you," said I to the Blind Bowler, "keep faithfully at his right hand, and never fail him?"

"That I will!" said the Blind Bowler. "Keep everlastingly at it, that's the motto!"

"The great King, my father," said I, turning again to the people, "will build your city ten times fairer than it was. I have given directions for your help already, and food and shelter will soon be at hand. Farewell! I leave you in the care of a blind man and a child! A sound heart and a cheerful mind, my friends, are better than an army. Farewell!"

The multitude shouted back farewell, and my friend Urban and myself each kissed Figli on the cheek; but my daughter kissed him on both cheeks and hugged him to her heart; and then we went down the steps, leaving the pale and beautiful boy and the blind man alone, and passed out across the park through a lane opened in the crowd, down into the city toward the city gate.

### *The Eight Tailors Stand Before Them in a Row*

As we came to the last street corner before reaching the city wall, my daughter pulled forth a handful of figs from

her pocket and divided them laughingly with Urban and myself; and at that moment a party of eight men filed solemnly from around the corner, and came to a stop before us in a row. It was the eight tailors. They bowed gravely, and the first one of them said:

"Excellency, we implore you to take pity upon us. Our master is gone, our occupation is gone, we are friendless and alone; we can live no longer in the city of Oogh."

"What do you wish me to do?" said I.

"We beseech you to take us with you, to be your servants, your slaves, anything. We can sew, we can knit, we can—"

"But I am going into exile," said I. "I am going to hide my hideous face from the eyes of the world."

"Listen, most merciful one! It is known to us that the missing button needs only to be sewn on the doublet by a tailor, with the proper thread, in order that your skin may be white again. Nine tailors are allowed for the trial, and here are eight!"

"But I have neither the button nor the thread."

"No matter! We will search until we find them, or else turn black ourselves in the trial. Have pity upon us, Prince!"

"Oh, father," said my daughter, "do let the poor things come along with us."

"Very well," said I, whereupon we walked on, and the eight tailors gave a faint cheer and fell into line behind us.

*They Meet the Three Blind Ballad Singers for the Last Time*

As we passed through the city gate, a loud singing struck up just outside the wall, and we beheld the three blind ballad singers, in the midst of a dozen idlers, prancing up and down in their ridiculous dance. They were shouting out one of their ballads, as follows:

“The peddler came, the peddler went, the peddler lost his pack,  
He came in honest walnut brown, he went away in black,  
And ‘Oh!’ said the peddler, ‘I cannot come again,  
For out of buttons ten, oh! only nine remain,  
Only nine remain,’—”

My daughter laughed aloud, and at the sound of her voice one of the ballad singers cried out, “Ho! master black-face! Ballads or buttons, what will you buy?”

The idlers laughed, and the other two vagabonds sang out:

“Ballads or buttons! Buy, master blackface! Ballads or buttons!”

“What will you give for a button?” shouted the first, and he held up in my view a large ivory button, the identical one, beyond a doubt, which was missing from the doublet.

“A fig for a button!” I said, and held out one of the figs in my hand.

“A button for a fig! A bargain!” cried the first ballad singer, and taking the fig from me placed the button in my hand.



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The idlers laughed at this nonsense, and we turned to go.

"Farewell, farewell!" cried the first ballad singer. "What do we say to the breaker of hearts who forgets her promise to marry?" The other two laughed, and began to sing.

We moved on down the road, followed by the tailors marching by fours, and as we departed we heard behind us the voices of the blind ballad singers for the last time, shouting out a song in this wise:

"She said that she wanted to marry all three,  
Fiddle-de-dee! Fiddle-de-dee!

And it broke her heart that it could not be,

But 'Oh!' said she, 'you must all agree

On one who shall be the fortunate he,

For only one can I marry!

But oh! she would not wait to see,

And oh! she would not tarry,

For all that she said to the artless three

Was nothing but fiddle-de-dee,

Ah me!

Was nothing but fiddle-de-dee!"



## THE FOURTH NIGHT

### THE RAGPICKER AND THE PRINCESS

**T**HE Queen said, "Domino!" very sweetly, and smiled at the Second Lady in Waiting, who was much chagrined.

"I don't see how I could have been so stupid," said the Second Lady in Waiting.

"Indeed, my dear," said the Queen, kindly, "I don't think you were nearly so stupid as usual."

At this moment the Princess Dorobel, with Prince Bilbo and their son Bojohn, and the latter's friend Bodkin, came in from the throne room, and the Princess Dorobel, standing behind the Queen's chair, said:

"Mother, we are going to hear a story, and Bojohn insists that you—"

"Yes, grandmother!" said Bojohn. "We are going to ask Solario for another story, and you must come along too."

"Dear me," said the Queen. "I must put away the dominoes first."

She stacked them neatly in the box, one by one, and when this was done she rose, and Bojohn took her arm and led her through the throne room where the King was engaged at chess with the Lord Chamberlain.

"My dear," said the Queen to the King, "you had better come with us. We are going to—"

"It makes no difference to me," said the King. "You can have the bishop if you want him. But I've got your queen! How do you like that? It's your move! Go on, why don't you move?"

"It's no use, grandmother," said Bojohn. "Come along."

They left the King at his game, and proceeded to the room of Solario the Tailor in the tower. They were admitted by Solario himself.

In the center of the room stood Mortimer the Executioner. He was wearing an unfinished garment without any sleeves, fastened together with pins, and basted with white thread along the seams. He looked extremely foolish.

"Oh!" said Solario, covered with confusion. "Pray come in, come in! Her majesty herself! This is indeed an honor! I will find more chairs in the next room. I am overpowered by this honor. Pray be seated, your majesty. Mortimer,

*the fitting is postponed. Pray be seated, your majesty. I do not know when I have received the honor of such a visit. Pray be seated. Mortimer, bring in some chairs. I beg your majesty to take the other chair; it is far more comfortable. Mortimer, divest yourself; divest yourself."*

*Mortimer, red with embarrassment, took off the unfinished garment and put on his old one. Solario ran from chair to chair, assisting each of the party to a seat.*

*"We have come for a story," said Prince Bilbo, "and I hope that you will be so good as to—"*

*"We want to hear about Montesango's Cave!" cried Bojohn.*

*"Or the Blind Giant!" said Bodkin.*

*"I beg your pardon," said Solario, "perhaps her majesty would deign to—"*

*"Ask him for Montesango's Cave, grandmother!" cried Bojohn.*

*"Dear me," said the Queen, "I hardly know what to— It's a very pleasant room you have here, Solario; do you ever play dominoes here? Dear me!"*

*"I'll tell you what I should like," said the Princess Dorel. "I should like to hear how the goldsmith's son won the Princess. Bojohn has been telling us about Alb and the Princess Hyla, and I understand there is a story, a love story—you know I dearly like love stories."*

*"It isn't precisely a love story," said Solario, "but if her majesty will permit me, I will—"*

*"Dear me, yes," said the Queen. "A very comfortable room it is, to be sure."*



*Solario, after receiving the Queen's permission to be seated, sat himself cross-legged on his table, and all of the others, Mortimer the Executioner, Bodkin, Prince Bilbo, Bojohn, the Princess Dorobel, and the Queen, drew up their chairs before him in a row.*

*"I will relate to you, seeing that you wish it," said Solario, "the story told me by Alb, the goldsmith's son, regarding the winning of the Princess Hyla. Shall I proceed?"*

*"I wish I had brought my knitting," said the Queen, "but never mind."*

*Solario picked up his shears, and gazing at them thoughtfully for a moment, cleared his throat.*

*"This, then," said he, "is the story told me by Alb, regarding*

#### "THE RAGPICKER AND THE PRINCESS."

When I was sixteen years old (said Alb the Fortunate) and my dear Princess Hyla fourteen, the King, her father, sojourned for a time at his castle of Ventamere, beside the sea; and you may be sure that the Princess was with him there, for he could never bear to be parted from her for a single day.

My father followed in the King's train, and I, on my part, was not to be left behind; and we lodged together, my father and myself, in the town hard by the castle, where I saw the Princess every day, and daily grew in favor with her father.

The windows of the King's castle looked out across the

Great Sea, and beneath the windows of the Princess's room the tide washed up and down against the wall.

One evening, as it was growing dusk, and the moon was beginning to tinge a wave here and there with silver, the Princess was leaning out from her window and looking across the sea— But what I am now to tell you I did not know at the time, as you will understand, but only later.

Night fell, and still the Princess leaned upon her hand and gazed out across the sea. I do not know whether she was thinking of me, but—However. In the town of Ventamere near by, where the shore curved inward in a bay, lights began to glimmer, but the castle was dark, for the King, intending to commence at daybreak his journey back to his capital, was already a-bed.

*The Princess Hears a Voice from the Waves Beneath Her Window*

The Princess, beginning to be drowsy, reached out her hand to close the casement of her window; and as she did so she heard a voice, a melancholy voice, not loud, as of a young man singing to himself, directly beneath her window. She started in astonishment and looked down, but she could see no one. The moonlight glittered on the sea to the very base of her wall; there was no foothold anywhere for a human foot; but the voice rose nevertheless from just below her in the restless waters, and it was singing a kind of lament, pausing once to put in a few spoken words, in this wise:

"O quivering seas that sever,  
 O quivering severing sea!  
 And I would I could sing forever  
 The sorrows that sleep in me,—  
 The soundless sundering sorrows,  
 The shuddering secret sorrows,  
 The sorrows secret and soundless,  
 That sleep in the soul of me.  
 And O! the vain endeavor!  
 The silence and the pain!  
 The silence that now shall never  
 Sink into the sea again!  
 (That's a very good line, though,  
 about silence sinking into the sea.  
 It sounds a good deal like real  
 poetry. Anyway—)  
 Of such would I sing forever,  
 And sighing forever sing,  
 But alas, I never was clever  
 At all that sort of thing,  
 And though I would chant forever  
 By quivering seas that sever  
 And severing seas that quiver  
 A ceaseless sorrowing song,  
 I cannot sing forever,  
 For that would be too long."

The Princess waited, and the voice began again. It seemed farther out on the water now, as if the singer were moving out to sea. The words appeared to her to be so strange that she never forgot them, and I am able to repeat them to you precisely as she gave them to me afterward.

## SOLARIO THE TAILOR

“O weary the sea’s commotion,  
And weary the sea tides’ fret,  
The fretful tides of the ocean  
How weary and how wet!  
The humid hateful ocean  
The hideous heedless ocean,  
The ocean huge and humid,  
That always will be wet!  
(If I could only once get thoroughly  
dry, just for a single day! It makes  
me weary, the way they go on about a  
life on the ocean wave. I only wish  
*they* had to live in it all the time.)  
And O! for a seat on the settle  
Beside the ingle nook!  
And O! for the steaming kettle!  
And O! for a human cook!  
I hear, on the soft breeze sighing,  
The sorrowful soft breeze dying,  
I hear, as it sighs and rustles,  
The music of bacon frying,  
And O, I long to be free!  
(If I could only get ashore on two  
feet, for just one hour, I know where  
I’d go. I know a good warm tavern  
where—)  
O dear! could I only be free!  
For a diet of fish and mussels,  
Of cold raw fish and mussels,  
Did never agree with me.”

The voice moved off across the sea, and died away in the distance.



"Dear me!" said the Queen. *"What an extraordinary song! And so sad, too."*

"Never mind, grandmother," said Bojohn. *"Please let him go on with his story."*

"Yes, yes, of course," said the Queen, *"let the poor man go on with his story. I wonder how he remembers all those words. I'm sure I never could have remembered them. I've a very poor memory for songs, myself. It's different with the King; I declare he never forgets anything. I remember there was a minstrel came to the castle once, and after he was gone the King repeated word for word—"*

*"Please, grandmother,"* said Bojohn.

*"What is it, my dear?"*

*"Solario is waiting to go on with his story."*

*"So he is,"* said the Queen. *"I think it's a very pretty story indeed. I wonder how it ends!"*

*"Go on!"* cried Bojohn, and Solario proceeded.

The Princess lingered, hoping to hear the voice again, but it came no more. She turned back into her room and lit the lamp which hung from the center of the ceiling. She stood before her mirror, with the lamp at her back, and as she raised her hand to unfasten the pearl necklace which she wore, she glanced at the wall beside the mirror. Her shadow, thrown by the lamp, stood upright against the wall. And at that moment she saw something which caused her to stiffen with terror.

*The Princess Sees the Shadow of an Old Woman*

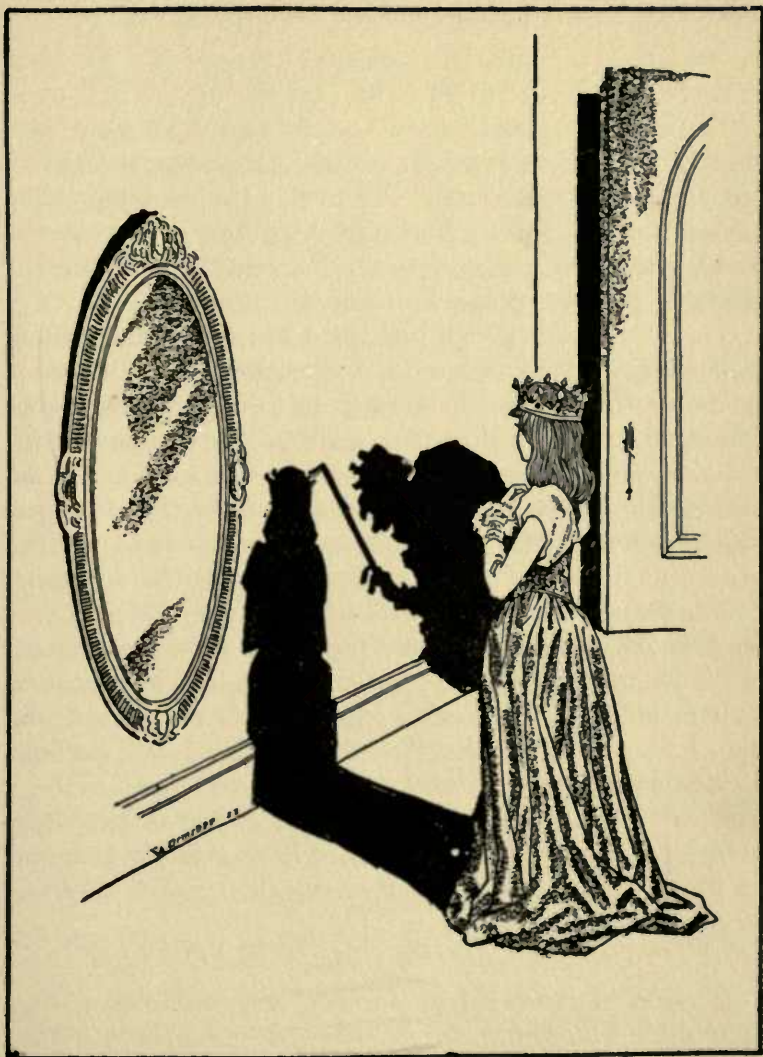
Through the crack of her closed door at the right of her shadow, another shadow was oozing in and spreading itself out across the wall toward her own. It took shape, and paused for a moment; it was the shadow of a bent old woman, stooping under a heavy bag, and holding out in one hand a kind of poker with a hook at the end.

The Princess held her breath. The stooping shadow stole slowly along the wall, and touched the Princess's shadow with its poker. Instantly the Princess's shadow began to move toward the other, and the other began to back away. The strange shadow reached the door and slipped into the crack; the Princess's shadow followed, and slipped into the crack after it. They were gone, and only the blank surface of the wall remained.

The Princess tried to move, but she could not stir; she tried to cry out, but she could not speak. She stood there in the lamplight before her mirror, with one hand upraised as if to unfasten her necklace; the minutes passed, and she did not move. She heard the splashing of the tide outside; a clock struck the hour; there was no other sound. Hours passed, and still she stood with hand raised to her neck, before the mirror. She heard the clock strike twelve; and on the twelfth stroke her door swung slowly open.

*A Midnight Visit from a One-Armed Old Man*

In the doorway stood an old man; a spare old man, with long white hair and beard, and bright blue eyes in a rosy



The shadow of a Ragpicker oozed in through the door







face. His blue gown, spangled with silver stars, lacked one sleeve, the right; he had only one arm, and that the left. The Princess felt somehow that she was glad he had come.

He stepped quickly to her side and smiling kindly took down her hand from her neck. She felt a pleasant warmth at his touch, and she sighed with relief. He kept her hand in his, and drew her toward the door. She had no wish to resist him. She followed quietly, and together they passed out of the room into the dark hall. . . .

At daybreak, when the King was ready to depart, there was a great to-do. The Princess was nowhere to be found. Her lamp was still burning, and her bed had not been slept in. The King was beside himself, and the castle was in a turmoil. Searchers were sent in every direction, all the bells in the town were set to ringing, and cryers went about the streets proclaiming a reward.

My father and myself hastened to the castle, and I knelt before the King and begged his special leave to seek the Princess on my own account. I knew nothing, save that she had vanished in the night, but I resolved that I would find her, and I did not doubt of my success.

"Go," said the King, "and good fortune attend you. If you bring her back, no reward will I refuse you, even to the hand of my dear child herself. Make haste, and do not return alone."

*Alb, Seeking the Princess, Sits Down by the Seashore*

All that morning I ran about the town, seeking her in every quarter; but nowhere was any trace of her to be found.

I came back in the afternoon to the seashore near the castle, there to ponder what I had best do next. Trudging along a strip of sand under a bluff beside the sea, I came to a large rock which rose up out of the water at the beach's edge, and climbing up on it I seated myself on a narrow shelf and bared my head to the breeze.

I had sat thus only a moment when I heard a voice from the other side of the rock, a melancholy voice, not loud, as of a young man singing to himself; and it was singing a mournful song, pausing now and then to speak in ordinary tones. I remember the words very well, and they were these.

"I dream in my deep-sea cavern  
Of many a bosky copse,  
I dream of a cosy tavern  
And a couple of mutton chops,—  
For even the storks have gruel,  
And even the sheep have corn,  
But me!—it is too, too cruel!  
Alas, that I ever was born.  
(It's too cruel, that's what it is. It isn't  
right. There's no justice in it, and I'm  
sick of it, that's what I am.)  
O sorrow too deep to utter!  
O midnight hour of the soul!  
If there only were bread and butter,  
Or something warm in a bowl,—  
(I don't care what. I'm so sick of raw  
fish, I believe I could even stand stewed  
rhubarb.)  
O sea, so ceaselessly sloshing,

O emblem of peace and hope!—  
 But it's utterly useless for washing,  
 And O! how I yearn for soap.  
 I seek, in my cavern's enclosure,  
 To talk with the fishes, but they,  
 Maintaining the strictest composure,  
 Have simply nothing to say.  
 Proud heart, you are left unheeded  
 Alone with your grief and your ache,  
 When all that is really needed  
 Is just a mere trifle of cake.  
 (Not fish cake. Not that. Chocolate  
 cake, three layers, with walnuts on top  
 and in between.)  
 Sing on, proud heart, though breaking  
 With every harmonious strain,  
 And physic be not worth the taking  
 For your description of pain,  
 Sing on, though it be not forever,  
 Forever and a day,—  
 (Not that there's any sense in adding  
 on a day to forever. It's long enough,  
 in all conscience, without that. How-  
 ever—)  
 I wish I could sing forever  
 To pass the dull time away;  
 And could I be endlessly clever  
 And make me an endless song,  
 I would sing of my sorrow forever,  
 I would,—were it not so long."

The voice gave a great sigh, and the singing ceased.

*"I used to make up little rhymes when I was a girl," said the Queen, "and very pretty little rhymes they were, too, or*

*at least your grandmother, Dorobel, used to say so. But dear me; I never could remember verses, no matter how hard I tried; never."*

*"Yes, yes, grandmother," said Bojohn. "Go on, Solario."*

*"Now the King was different; he could remember them, but he couldn't make them up; and I could make them up, but I couldn't remember them! Tee-hee-hee! Dear, dear! When I think of it!"*

*"Grandmother," said Bojohn, "Solario is waiting to go on."*

*"So he is," said the Queen. "I never liked sad stories when I was a girl, for they always made me cry. But this one may turn out better than I expect. I really think you're doing very nicely, Solario. I always say, that no matter how poorly one makes out, he ought to be praised if he is doing his best."*

*"Go on!" cried Bojohn; and Solario proceeded.*

When the singing ceased (said Alb) I climbed noiselessly around the rock to the other side, and looked down.

### *An Interview with a Talking Seal*

A fat seal was lying below me on a ledge of the rock, just out of the water. The creature raised his head, and gazed up at me with his big soft eyes.

"I could have sworn the voice was here," said I, half aloud.

"Are you speaking to me?" said the seal.

I assure you I jumped in amazement. "What!" said I. "Was it you?"



"Well," said the seal, "there's nobody else here, is there?"

"Of all things!" said I. "A talking seal! I never heard of such a—"

"I suppose I haven't any right to talk. Just because I haven't any legs, and have to live in a horrible sealskin, I suppose I'm not even to utter a word. Is that it? Oh, yes, I dare say; I suppose so."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend—"

"I suppose not. Anyway, you'd better not stand there quarreling with me all day if you ever expect to find the Princess."

"Oh! Do you know anything about her? Tell me, quick!"

"Yes, I do. I know a little about her. I know where she is. The Ragpicker's shadow came last night and fetched away the Princess's shadow, because the Ragpicker needed the Princess's shadow to protect her against the people. Everybody is afraid of shadows,—I suppose you know that. And then the One-Armed Sorcerer took away the Princess, and what he's going to do with her I don't know. But you'd better find out. Are you ready to go?"

"Yes, yes! I'm ready! I'll go anywhere! Tell me where!"

"You talk brave enough. The question is, do you act as brave as you talk? Do you mind getting half-drowned?"

"No, no! I mind nothing! Tell me what I must do!"

"Sounds very brave, indeed. Are you afraid of shadows?"

"Of course not!"

"Then you're the only person in these parts who isn't. Where you're going, they're all afraid of shadows, and that's how the Ragpicker protects herself against the people; with shadows. And so you're not afraid of them. Well, well!"

"I'm not afraid of anything! Tell me what to do!"

"So! Pretty brave! All right, I'll take you there myself. Take off your coat and shoes."

I took off my shoes, stockings, and coat.

The seal hunched himself down into the water, and lay there with his head resting on the rock.

"Now," said he, "come down here and lie on my back, and hold on tight; and don't get in the way of my flippers."

I hesitated for a moment at the idea of lying down in the water on the back of a seal, but I came down the rock and stretched myself out on his back and clung to him with my arms and legs as well as I could.

### *A Sea Journey on the Back of a Seal*

"Hold on tight," said the seal, and darted off across the sea so suddenly that I lost my grip and fell off into the water; but he swam under me, and I was soon on his back once more, none the worse.

"What's the matter?" said the seal. "Haven't you any strength? I suppose I'll have to go slower."

He glided slowly and smoothly over the long swells, and as soon as I got used to it I found that it was really wonderful sport. We followed the shore line quite around the island to its opposite side, and then the seal made straight

for the open sea. The shore faded away behind us, and at last it was gone.

Hours passed, and I grew stiff and cold. I slipped off the seal's back now and then, for the exercise of swimming. It was excessively difficult to hold on to his slippery skin, and I ached so painfully with the strain that I feared at last that I should have to let go for good; and I was about to give up, when I saw afar off on the horizon what looked like land. The seal swam faster. I took new courage, and clung to him tighter.

It was indeed land,—evidently an island; and as we came close to it I could make out in its side a deep cove, backed with dark, woody hills and flanked on either side by rocky cliffs. Fishing boats of all sizes were moored in the cove, and a large village straggled up the hillside behind.

The seal glided into the smooth water between the cliffs, and slid up against the sand of the beach at the foot of the village. It was just twilight.

I jumped to my feet and stretched my numb and aching limbs, gazing with curiosity at the near-by houses. I turned round at the sound of the seal's voice.

"Can you get me a custard pie?" said the seal.

"What?" said I, in astonishment.

"There's a pastry cook in the village. I'll wait for you here. Mince pie'll do, if they're out of custard."

I hastened away into the village, without saying anything more.

*The Village of Storks*

It was a large village; and there were a good many streets; and before I found the pastry cook's shop I paused to look at the strange collection of birds which adorned the house-tops. On nearly every chimney or ridgepole stood a stork, and on some were two or three, and even more; young storks all of them, judging by their size.

I noticed, as I passed the villagers in the street, that their faces were very sad; and I thought it singular that although I saw many grown people, I met no children, and heard no children's voices.

The pastry cook, when I found him, proved to have the saddest face of all, and his wife looked as if she had been weeping; and there were on the pastry cook's housetop no less than five small storks. When I mentioned that I wanted a custard pie for a seal, the pastry cook handed over the pie to me without any appearance of surprise, and without accepting any payment.

I hurried back to the beach, and sat down before the seal and held the custard pie while the hungry creature ate it.

"Did you ever eat raw fish?" said he.

"I should say not," said I.

"It's awful," said the seal. "It's positively petrifying. You know I wasn't always a seal. Custard pie always used to do me more good than anything else."

"Tell me who you are," said I, "and who the Ragpicker is."



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"There's no time now," said the seal. "You'd better be going. The people here would like to kill the Ragpicker if they could, but they're afraid of the shadows; she's afraid of the people, and the people are afraid of the shadows; and she's more afraid of the One-Armed Sorcerer than anybody else, though between you and me I think she's wrong about it, because he seems to be a pretty decent sort of old chap, and I rather believe he'd like to help her if she wasn't afraid of him; but of course you can't help a person who's afraid of you. All mixed up, isn't it?"

"I don't understand a word of it," said I.

"Brave people are always stupid," said the seal, and with this he wriggled himself off into the water, and I saw his head going back and forth slowly from side to side across the cove.

I turned and went into the village. It was now nearly dark.

As I came toward the pastry cook's shop again, the village cryer came walking down the street, ringing a bell, and calling out, over and over again, "Seven o'clock, and time for supper! Seven o'clock, and time for supper!"

As the cryer passed by, the storks flapped their wings and flew down from the housetops, and took their stand in a row before their houses, along the curbs; and wherever a stork stood before a house a woman came out with a bowl in her hand. When I reached the pastry cook's shop, the pastry cook's wife was kneeling on the sidewalk before the five little storks, feeding them gruel out of a bowl with a long spoon. I observed that all along the street women

were feeding the storks in the same way; but again I noticed that there were no children.

I walked on, watching in every street the feeding of the storks, and looking out for some sign of the Princess. I observed at last a gilded wooden arm and hand holding a lantern, projecting from the front wall of a house a little in advance; and before this house, at the curb, a single stork was standing, and an old man, one-armed, wearing white hair and beard and dressed in a blue gown with silver stars, was sitting before the stork, feeding it with a long spoon from a bowl in his lap. Around the stork's neck hung a pearl necklace.

Wondering whether I had ever seen that necklace before, I passed behind the old man, and as I did so the stork fixed its eye on me and ruffled its feathers in agitation. I had no sooner gone by than there was a great fluttering among all the storks, and I observed, coming toward me down the street, a bent old woman, stooping under a bulging bag and holding out what appeared to be a poker with a hook at the end. She was ragged and decrepit, and there was a gleam in her eye which seemed to me to be more of terror than anything.

She gazed intently at the stork with the necklace, and then passed on down the street. All the storks, at sight of her, suddenly flew up on to the housetops, and all the people, or nearly all, went hurriedly indoors. As I turned to follow her with my eyes, I saw that the stork with the necklace was perched up on the ridgepole, and that the old one-armed man was gone.

*The Ragpicker Frightens the Men Away with Her Bag*

The Ragpicker had reached the next corner, and was about to turn into the street at her right, when a dozen men came hurrying toward her in a group, and she stopped and faced them. They were burly men, and they were plainly angry; they carried cudgels, and one of them carried a rope; they meant to do her harm, without a doubt. They advanced on her, muttering dangerously together, and she stood stock still, waiting. One of the men gave a shout, and they rushed upon her in a body; but quick as a wink the old woman whisked her bag from her shoulder to the ground, and began to open it; and at this the men fell back against each other as if afraid; and as the old woman made again as if to open the bag, the men hesitated, turned about, and actually took to their heels and fled.

The Ragpicker slung her bag upon her back again, turned the corner, and disappeared.

What could be in that bag, I wondered, to make those burly men afraid?

I hurried to the corner, and saw the old woman plodding away toward the end of the street. She did not look around, and I followed her cautiously. She passed beyond the village houses and began to climb a path which wound up the hillside among the rocks.

Keeping carefully out of sight behind her, I saw her stop at last beside a hut which leaned against the side of the hill, and go in at its door. I stole up quietly. There were no windows in the hut, but I thought I might be able to see

inside through the roof, which was only a thatch of straw. I could easily reach it from the side of the hill. In a moment I was lying on the roof, and digging away the straw with my fingers.

I worked slowly and noiselessly, and after a time made a hole through which I could look down into the hut. It was dark below, but I could see the old woman stooping down over an opening in the floor, from which she was just raising a trapdoor. She stepped down into the opening and closed the door over her head.

I lost no time in making a hole in the thatch big enough to admit my body; and when I had done so I dropped to the floor, and stood beside the trapdoor. I raised it cautiously and peered down. All was dark below, but I could make out a flight of stone steps. I went down without a sound.

*He Follows the Ragpicker Down Into the Dark*

At the bottom I got down on my hands and knees and crawled along, touching the side of a wall at my right. The wall ended abruptly, and feeling the ground before me I found that I was on the edge of open space, and I could hear the rushing of water far below. My hand touched the top of a ladder, and I went down it carefully; but after a moment my foot dangled in space, and I nearly fell off; the ladder stopped short, and I clung on desperately. I then climbed to the top again and crawled along toward my left, feeling the edge with my hand until I shortly touched the top of another ladder; and down this ladder, fastened securely against the wall, I went more cautiously than before.



The ladder was long, but I finally found myself on solid ground. Following the wall to the left, I passed around a corner, and as I did so I saw a light.

It was a square patch of light, like the light of a small window, afar off in the darkness. I went down on my hands and knees again and crawled toward it. The ground was unbroken here, and I could now scarcely hear the sound of water. I stopped at last directly beneath the light, and touched a wall. I felt with my left hand what seemed to be a closed door, and I got up slowly on my feet. I was looking into a lighted room through a small square window, without glass, and crossed with iron bars.

A lamp was burning brightly in a bracket on a wall of the room. On the earthen floor, near the center, the old Rag-picker was kneeling before a brazier containing a brisk fire, over which hung an iron pot. Her bag lay on the floor beside her, flat and limp; it was evidently empty.

*She Stirs a Steaming Mixture with Her Long Hooked Forefinger*

As I watched her, she arose from her knees and went to a door at the rear, and made sure that it was closed tight. She then went to a great heap of rubbish which was piled in one corner, and scratching with her poker amongst the rags, bones, and old iron there, picked out carefully a handful of bones, examining each one minutely. She then took from a shelf a large bottle of some dark liquid, and with this and the bones she returned to the fire. She poured the liquid into the iron pot and dropped in the bones, one by one; and

as she did so I observed a thing which I had not discerned before, that what I had thought was a poker held in her hand was in fact a long, black, stiff forefinger, hooked at the end. There was no doubt about it; it was the first finger of her right hand, as stiff as an iron rod, and about a foot and a half long. She stuck it into the steaming pot and stirred the mixture with it, muttering to herself words which I could not understand.

Presently she stopped stirring, and sniffing the contents of the pot nodded her head as if satisfied. She picked up from the ground an iron ladle and a pewter bowl, and ladling the steaming liquid from the pot into the bowl, drank it down, every drop.

She put down the ladle and the bowl, and stood motionless, as if waiting. A change began to come over her. Her back straightened; she grew taller; the wrinkles left her face; her skin became fairer, her eyes larger, her hair longer; and there before my eyes stood a young and beautiful damsel, tall and erect, with dark eyes in a pale face, and two thick braids of brown hair hanging to her waist.

She held up her right hand and looked at it. The long black stiff finger with the hook was still there. She screamed, and burying her face on her left arm shook with sobs. In a moment she raised her head and put away her hideous right hand behind her where she could not see it. Her left hand she placed over her eyes, with a gesture of despair, and as she remained standing in that attitude the hand over her eyes grew old and withered; she began to shrink and stoop,

and she moaned to herself. It was plain that the effect of what she had drunk was beginning to wear off. She shuddered, and gave a mournful cry; and in another instant she was the old, bent Ragpicker again.

I drew a long breath. I stood back, for fear that I might be seen, and when I looked again the old woman was standing with her back toward me, facing the closed door at the rear. I noticed now, what I had not noticed before, that she cast no shadow in the lamplight on the floor.

"Skag!" she cried. "Come hither!"

A shadow oozed into the room through the crack of the door, and moved upright across the floor toward the Ragpicker. It was the shadow of a bent old woman, stooping under a bulky bag, and holding out what appeared to be a poker, hooked at the end; the shadow of the old Ragpicker herself. It stood still, not far from the door.

"It's no use, Skag," said the old woman to her shadow. "I haven't found the right bone; but I *will* find it, yet! I'll find it yet! Bring in the Princess's shadow."

Her own shadow disappeared through the crack in the door, and returned immediately, followed by another. I started, and almost cried out. It was the shadow of a young girl, undoubtedly the Princess, and it stood upright on the floor beside the other.

"Ah!" said the old woman. "Now my shadows are complete. This one is the best and most fearsome of all. Ah, how they fear the shadows! Lucky for me, lucky for me! They're not afraid of me, but they're afraid of shadows! This day they would have killed me, but for my bag of

shadows. We mustn't lose them, Skag, we mustn't lose them."

She paced about, growing more and more excited, and went on talking as she walked.

"We're in danger, Skag, we're in danger. The One-Armed Sorcerer is working against us. He has brought the Princess herself here, to help him against me. What can he mean to do? He means to take away my shadows from me, Skag, it must be that. And he has brought the Princess to help him. And what then? Death, Skag, death; a quick death, for what will the people be afraid of then? We must stop it, Skag, we must stop the sorcerer, and there is only one way. The Princess must be destroyed! To-morrow morning, when the sun shines and the shadows can be seen, I will seek her out and destroy her; and the shadows shall go with me and protect me. Bring in the shadows, Skag."

### *The Shadows of the Children*

The old woman's shadow disappeared through the crack again, and immediately returned; and behind it came a shadow, and another, and another; many shadows, all of children, and they moved upright across the floor and stood before the Ragpicker. They were flat as paper and black as ink; and the lamplight did not shine through them. They kept on coming, and the room was soon full of them; hundreds, as it seemed, hundreds of shadows of little children, some so small that they were just beginning to walk. And the shadow of the Princess was the tallest of all.



The Ragpicker pointed at the Princess's shadow with her long, black rod of a finger, and said, "Into the bag!"

She stooped to her bag and held it open at the floor, and the shadow of the Princess moved to it, crouched, and went in.

"In, all of you!" cried the old woman.

All the shadows crowded around the mouth of the bag, and one after another stooped and went in. There was none left but the shadow of the old woman herself. She closed the bag, now bulging, and flinging it over her shoulder she said to her own shadow, "Hither, Skag, and lie down!"

Her shadow moved close to her, and spread itself out on the ground with its feet to hers, growing longer as it did so, so that it became no more than an ordinary shadow cast by the lamplight on the floor.

The old woman went to the lamp and blew out the light, and the room was in darkness, except for the glimmer of the dying fire.

I flattened myself on the ground as the door opened and the old woman came forth with her bag on her back. I could scarcely see her, and in an instant she had disappeared in the darkness.

### *He Loses His Way in the Dark*

I waited a moment or two, and then crawled cautiously in the direction I thought she had taken; but there was nothing but the blackness of deep night all round me, and I could not be sure of my direction. I looked behind me, and I could not see any longer the window I had just left. I had come

from the ladder easily enough, but it was plainly a different matter to get back. I crawled on uncertainly, and stopped now and then; I had gone by this time farther than I had come at first, but I found no wall. I must have lost my way. I went on, and found myself going down a slope. I knew that this could not be right, and I changed my course a little; but I was still going down the slope, and I was afraid that I would be utterly lost if I turned back.

The sound of rushing water came to my ears now. The slope grew steeper, and I crawled more cautiously. The sound of water became more distinct. The ground was suddenly slimy, and before I knew it I was slipping down a steep descent, unable to stop myself. I slid and slid, faster and faster, clutching the slimy ground and rolling over and over; and as I was fainting with dizziness I shot off into space, and came down with a splash into a torrent of deep water.

The stream hurled me away. I struggled against it, but it was too swift. It was impossible to swim. I could do no more than keep my head above water, and let the current fling me along into the darkness. Tossed like a leaf, hurled against the walls of the stream, scratched by the edges of rocks, bruised, bleeding, and half-drowned, I almost lost consciousness, and scarcely knew anything more until I felt myself lying on soft sand in shallow water. I looked up, and saw above me a clear sky; the open sea was rolling toward me on a beach, and the moon was glittering on the waves.

I tottered to my feet. I was so weak and sore that I could hardly stand. When I was able to move, I walked forward toward the ocean. The stream which had brought me

spread out and lost itself in the sand. At my feet the breakers came rushing up, and a strip of beach lay at my right hand and my left, enclosed at the back and sides by a high cliff. There was no way out except by climbing the cliff. I shouted, hoping that the seal might be out there in the water, but there was no response. I made up my mind that I would have to climb the cliff.

It was a cruel task, for the cliff was steep, and there was scarcely any foothold but an occasional rock and bush; but I never once thought of discouragement, and I stuck to it with all my might. My bare feet and my hands were torn by the rocks, but I kept on, up and up, and in time I stood on the top. I hastened away along the edge of the cliff, and came after a long walk to a place where the cliff turned back shoreward; and there I looked down, and saw the roofs of the village straggling up its hillside behind the cove.

### *He Hears the Voice of the Seal Again*

I lay down and put my head out over the edge of the cliff, and at that moment there came to me from the still water of the cove a faint, sad voice, singing:

“O wonderful pancake batter!  
 O table and fork and plate!  
 I wonder whatever’s the matter,  
 That he keeps me waiting so late?  
 He said he was willing to serve us  
 Regardless of danger or pelf,  
 But I’m getting so dreadfully nervous  
 I really am scarcely myself.

## SOLARIO THE TAILOR

O why does he loiter and linger  
While I wait so sorry and sick?  
Let him sever the Ragpicker's finger  
And do it almightily quick.  
For then I shall sit at a table,  
My napkin over my knees,  
And tiddle as long as I'm able,  
And gobble as long as I please,  
With plenty of good hot curry,  
And plenty of custard pie,—  
If he only would hurry, hurry!  
O why does he linger, why?"

The voice stopped, and I rose to my feet and made off across the moonlit fields.

*"There used to be a baker at the castle," said the Queen, "shortly after I was married, who made up a great many very pretty songs. The King used to say that he sang better than he baked. For my part, I was very sorry to lose him. His niece was going to be married in one of our villages, I forget which,—no, I believe it was a cousin; I am almost sure it was his cousin, and I think it was the niece who was looking after his mother while he was here, and she had to go and keep house for the cousin after she was married, and that left his mother all alone; so that he had to go back to his mother, and I always thought he was such a good son to give up his place here at the castle in order to take care of his poor old mother, and I'm sure very few would have done it in his place; but I must say that the next baker was very much better at gingerbread, though he never made up any*



*songs, and I think the King himself missed the first one a good deal afterward, though he never would say so."*

*"Go on!" cried Bojohn; and Solario proceeded.*

I rose to my feet (said Alb) and made off across the fields. I found a path which wound down to the village, and I was presently standing in the street. All the storks were gone, probably within doors for the night.

I set forth briskly to find the house of the One-Armed Sorcerer. I realized that the stork with the necklace was the Princess herself, and I knew that if she was to be saved from the Ragpicker I must act quickly.

I remembered the gilded wooden arm and hand, holding a lantern, which stood out from the one-armed man's house, and it was only a matter of time to find it. I found it sooner than I expected. A light was burning dimly in the lantern, but the house was dark. There was no stork upon the house-top. I tried the handle of the door quietly, and to my surprise the door gave before me, and I pushed it open.

### *He Peeps into the Sorcerer's Workshop*

I found myself in a dark room, which I crossed quickly to a door at the other side. This door I opened on a crack, and through the crack I looked into a lighted room; a small room, evidently a workshop, cluttered about with glass vessels of strange shapes, metal machines of various sorts, wooden hoops curiously interlaced, charts of the skies, and great, brass-bound books; and at one side of the room was a forge and in the center a table.

Before this table was standing the one-armed man whom

I had already seen. On the table, the stork with the necklace was lying on its side, perfectly still, and as I looked the old man plucked a feather from the stork's wing and examined it carefully. He then cast it aside and plucked another, this time from the back. This also he tossed away, after examining it, and he then plucked a feather from the shoulder, and holding it up to the light gave a cry of pleasure, and without turning said, "Come in, Alb, I have been expecting you."

I stepped into the room, and the old man greeted me with a friendly smile, and held up the feather.

"Do you see this?" said he.

I looked at it closely. At the point of the quill hung a single drop of blood.

The stork on the table stirred uneasily. The sorcerer stroked it gently and said, "Sleep!" and the stork lay perfectly still again.

"Wait a minute," said the old man. "We must keep this drop from falling off, and we must harden the point of the quill."

He produced from a closet a metal box, and out of this he took a small glass tube, covered with frost. He held the drop of blood for a moment inside the tube, and then put the tube away in its box.

"Now," said he, "the drop will not fall off."

He went to the forge, and blowing up the coals with a pair of bellows, he held the point of the quill for a moment in the fire.

"Now," said he, "it is as hard as a pin."



The One-Armed Sorcerer plucked a feather from the stork







"Sir," said I, "will you tell me what this is for?"

"To save the Ragpicker from herself," said the sorcerer.

"But it's the Princess I have come to save," said I.

"It is the same thing," said the old man. "If the Ragpicker is saved from herself, everybody else is saved too. And this drop of blood from the Princess's heart will do it, and nothing else."

"I have seen the Ragpicker to-night, sir," said I, "and I will tell you about it."

"Sit down, my son," said the old man, and when we were seated I told him all that I had seen and heard in the Ragpicker's cavern.

The sorcerer shook his head and smiled. "And so she thinks I wish to take away her shadows and let the people kill her! Well, well, it's the way of wickedness to see nothing but evil. Why should I wish her harm? What I seek to do is to save her, not to destroy her; but she'll never believe that, because she can't think straight. Anyway, in trying to do evil she has provided me with the means of making her good."

"How has she done that?" said I.

"If she hadn't stolen the Princess's shadow, I shouldn't have brought the Princess here; and if I hadn't brought the Princess here, she wouldn't now be a stork; and if she hadn't been turned to a stork I couldn't have gotten the drop of blood from her heart."

"Is it true," said I, "that the Ragpicker protects herself with shadows?"

"Of course! What could protect her better? What else

is there to fear, but shadows? I confess I'm more than half afraid of them myself. We all know we shouldn't be, but we are, just the same. They're perfectly harmless, but they're terrible. There's nothing so real as shadows."

"But tell me," said I, "how we are to save the Princess."

"All in good time," said the sorcerer; "in the meantime, you must get a little rest, for you have an important task to do in the morning."

I was tired out, in fact. The sorcerer left me, and I sat beside the sleeping stork, watching it in silence for a long while, and then I surrendered myself to drowsiness, and fell asleep.

When I awoke, it was morning. The stork was gone, and the sorcerer's hand was on my shoulder.

"Come," said he, and placed in my hand a tiny bow of thin metal, with a string of fine hair, and showed me how to use the stork's feather as an arrow to the bow. He then instructed me in what I had to do, and led me out into the street.

The stork which had been a Princess was standing on the curb before the door, and all the other storks were in their places on the housetops. The street was already busy; shops and houses were being opened for the day and many people were outdoors.

### *He Lies in Wait with a Bow and Arrow*

Carrying the stork's feather and the bow, I went to the next corner, round which on the evening before I had seen

the Ragpicker turn up toward her home. I passed this corner, and concealed myself in a doorway just beyond.

I had not long to wait. I had drawn my head back into the doorway for a moment, and when I looked again the Ragpicker was standing at the street crossing with her back toward me, gazing in the direction of the stork which stood before the sorcerer's door. On her back was her bag, and in her left hand she carried a knife. The people in the street stopped to watch her, muttering together.

"Skag!" said she, "come in!" And she turned sidewise to her shadow, which lay at a great length on the ground before her. It began to shorten toward her, and kept shortening until it was no longer than herself. "Stand up!" said she, and the shadow stood upright beside her, a black, flat image of herself in outline, looking as if it had been cut from stiff, black paper.

The Ragpicker let down the bag from her shoulder and opened it on the ground and said "Come out!" And at this all the people gave a cry of terror and fled into their houses and shut the doors, and all the storks on the housetops fluttered their feathers and flapped their wings.

### *The Ragpicker Releases the Shadows in the Street*

Out of the bag poured shadows; hundreds of them; all the shadows of little children which I had seen go into the bag the night before; and as they poured out, they ran about in the street as if bewildered.

"Skag!" said the Ragpicker. "To the fore!"

The old woman's shadow hastened to the front of all the others and raised its long poker finger, beckoning them to follow. They crowded behind, and moved noiselessly up the street toward the stork at the sorcerer's door. The Rag-picker followed close behind, holding her knife up in her left hand. The stork which was the Princess stood motionless on the curb before the door. The sorcerer was not to be seen.

Now was my time for action. I crept silently after the old woman, and came up just behind her. I fitted the feather with its drop of blood to the little bow, and as I approached the old woman so close that I might have touched her, I aimed quickly at her back and let the arrow fly. Straight into her back it darted, and stuck there fast.

"Skag!" she screamed, but she said no more.

Quick as a wink I plucked the feather from her back, and as I did so she turned upon me with her knife uplifted. But she stood suddenly still, her hand relaxed, and the knife fell to the ground. A change came slowly over her. Her back straightened; she grew taller; the wrinkles left her face; her skin became fairer, her eyes larger, her hair longer; and there was standing before me in her place a beautiful young damsel, tall and erect, with dark eyes in a pale face, and two thick braids of brown hair hanging to her waist.

She held up her right hand and looked at it, and gave a cry of joy. The long, black, hooked finger was gone. Her two hands were the shapely white hands of a young woman, without blemish.

"Free!" she cried. "The enchantment is over! I am my-



self at last! Oh, thanks, young man!" And she threw her arms around me and kissed me soundly on the cheek.

I released myself, awkwardly enough, and as I did so I saw all the shadows up the street fall flat to the ground, as if they had been knocked over by a ball; and they began to slip swiftly away in every direction across the pavement. In an instant Skag, the old Ragpicker's shadow, lay at the young woman's feet. She screamed and shrank away, but in another instant the shadow's shape was changed, and in its place on the ground was the shadow of the young woman herself. She clapped her hands with joy.

### *A Singular Commotion on the Housetops*

The shadows of the children were climbing the walls of the houses; and all of a sudden I heard a great clamor from the housetops, as of hundreds of children crying out together.

"We can't get down! Oh, I'm falling! Help! I can't hold on! Oh, Mother! We can't get down! I'm slipping! I'm going to fall! Hurry! Mother! Come quick!"

I looked up, and there on the housetops, where the storks had been, children were clinging to the chimney pots, straddling the ridgepoles, hanging on to the gables, big children and little children, boys and girls, shrieking out at the top of their voices, and struggling to keep from toppling off into the street. One tiny boy suddenly disappeared down a chimney; a big girl lost her hold and rolled down the roof into a wide leaden gutter, where she hung, half on and half off. Dozens of boys and girls sat astride the ridgepoles, as if

riding cockhorses. The big boys began to shout with glee, but the little ones were crying with fright; and at the hubbub all the doors flew open and all the fathers and mothers ran out, and when they saw what it was, a mighty shout went up, and it wasn't a minute before a ladder stood against every wall, and not more than two minutes before all the children were safe on the ground, hugged up in their mothers' and fathers' arms, with such laughing and weeping and cheering as never were, I am sure, in this world before.

"Oh, isn't it wonderful!" cried the beautiful young woman. "I'm so glad, so glad!"

"The Princess!" I cried. "Look at the Princess!"

*The Princess Is Herself Again, but—*

She was her own lovely self again, and she was standing at the same place on the curb before the sorcerer's house, and the sorcerer himself was standing beside her. The young woman and myself ran swiftly to her, and I shouted a joyous greeting as I approached; but to my surprise, she did not reply.

She was standing perfectly motionless, with her eyes wide open, and one hand raised to her neck as if about to unfasten her necklace. On her shoulder, shown by the open neck of her dress, was a tiny spot of blood.

The young woman kissed the sorcerer's hand and thanked him.

"But the Princess!" I cried. "What is the matter with the Princess?"

The sorcerer shook his head sadly. "Somebody always has to pay for these benefits," said he, "and I'm afraid that when we plucked the feather we took away something we cannot replace. She cannot move nor speak. But I will set to work, and in time I will—"

"Come!" said the young woman. "I will help her! We must take her home! Come at once!"

The sorcerer and myself lifted the Princess between us and carried her down the street toward the cove. The village people and their children followed us, and stood in a throng on the beach as we got into a boat and hoisted a sail.

"Good-bye!" shouted the people, and the sorcerer and myself waved our hands, none too cheerfully; and at that moment we heard a kind of bark from the water beside the boat, and a voice cried, "Sister!" It was the seal. The young woman leaned down toward him and cried, "Brother!"

"Is everything all right now?" said the seal. "What are you going to do about me?"

His sister raised the Princess and showed him the red mark on the Princess's shoulder, and told him about the plucking of the stork's feather. Then the seal's sister said:

"For once you have done a good deed, brother; and if you'll do another—you know the promise!—two good deeds!—you will be free too. Go! and do not return until you have brought that which will cure the Princess. The milk of the White Walrus who lives in the Far-Alone Grotto on the Twelfth Ice Floe! Do you understand?"

"It's a pretty good trip," said the seal, "and I'll probably

have to fight the walruses. But if you say so, why I suppose— When do you think I'd better start?"

"This instant!" cried his sister. "Off with you! And return to us at the King's castle at Ventamere."

"Oh, very well," said the seal, and dived. He came up again at the mouth of the cove, making off at a great rate for the open sea. . . .

We reached the King's castle at Ventamere in the evening, and pressed straightway into the Grand Refectory, where the King was at supper with his court. As we entered, the whole company sprang up, and my father ran toward me.

### *The King Beholds His Child and Is Grieved*

The sorcerer and myself, carrying the Princess, stood her on her feet and supported her thus between us, and the seal's sister stood beside us.

"My daughter!" cried the King, and rushing toward the Princess with outstretched arms, stopped in amazement as she remained between us as speechless and motionless as a statue.

I whispered rapidly into my father's ear, and the sorcerer, kneeling before the King, began to explain.

The King paid no attention to him, but placed a hand upon his daughter's arm and wept.

"My poor child!" he said. "What shall we do now?"

There was a movement at the door. A crowd of the castle people poured into the room, and parting, opened a lane for a young man, a stranger, who advanced rapidly from the door; a very fat young man, with a round, pink face and



round, blue eyes, who wore hanging from his shoulders the skin and head of a seal.

"Brother!" cried the seal's sister.

"Yes," said the fat young man, "it's me; and a pretty little time I've had among the walruses, I can tell you;" and he bowed low at the same time to the King.

"Have you some business with us, young sir?" said the King.

"Venison steak and hasty pudding," said the fat young man, with his eye on the supper table. "Oh; I beg your pardon. I am the milk man."

"Milk? We want no milk here," said the King.

"It's for the Princess," said the fat young man. "To be taken externally. Good for lumbago, rheumatism, sprains, chilblains, strawberry rash—"

"What is this fellow talking about?" said the King, in exasperation.

"Brother!" said the young woman, his sister, fixing him sternly with her eye.

"Rub a little on her shoulder," said her brother. "Direct from the White Walrus on the Twelfth Ice Floe, and the walruses nearly ate me alive before I got it; but here it is. Excellent for all sorts of skin and blood diseases, as well as—"

"Brother!" said the young woman, sternly.

"I beg your pardon," said the fat young man; and with a very grand manner he took out of his pocket an oyster shell, and pried it open with a knife from the table. On the lower half of the shell was a spoonful of white liquid.

*The Seal Introduces His Liniment, Guaranteed to Cure in All Cases*

"Very convenient milk bottle," said he; and waving the King aside he stepped up to the Princess and went on pompously, as if he were making a speech:

"I will now," said he, "in the presence of the entire company, and openly before you all, so that you may see that no deception is practised upon you, apply a modicum of my liniment to the shoulder of the young lady, at the point where I perceive a stain of red, rubbing the same in gently thus, with a downward motion of the first two fingers of the right hand, thus, and thus, and thus."

He poured the white liquid from the shell on to the red spot on the Princess's shoulder, and rubbed it in gently, talking all the while.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," he went on, "I call your attention to the effects of this lotion when properly applied. It is warranted to be very efficacious in all cases of— But see; she lowers her hand; she moves her foot; she speaks; she—"

"Father!" cried the Princess, and threw herself into her father's arms.

"Hurrah!" I shouted, and all the company cheered, until the rafters rang again.

"Let the castle people retire," said the King, and he led the Princess to the table, where he seated her at his right hand, wiping his eyes and blowing his nose. When we were all at table, the sorcerer told his tale, and not until he had

heard it to the end would the King permit the meal to proceed. I observed that the son of the assistant carol singer was very attentive to the seal's sister; and as for the fat young man her brother,—during the repast, which lasted a full two hours, he spoke not a word.

At the end the King begged him to relate the story of his enchantment and his sister's, and he readily consented; whereupon he commenced, without being asked a second time,

#### THE STORY OF THE TALKING SEAL AND HIS SISTER

"You must know," he began—

*"I am very sorry," said the Princess Dorobel, interrupting, "but it is Bojohn's bedtime, and I fear we shall have to hear this story another time."*

*"Oh, mother!" said Bojohn. "I couldn't go to sleep if I tried. Please don't—"*

*"No, my dear," said the Princess Dorobel, "not to-night. Pray go on with Alb's story, Solario."*

When the seal's story was finished (said Alb), the King begged the One-Armed Sorcerer to remain with him as his friend and adviser; and this the sorcerer consented to do.

"And now," said the King, turning to me, "what reward shall be yours? I will deny you nothing."

I knelt before him, and made my request boldly. I knew that my whole future hung upon that moment.

"The hand of my lady Princess," said I, "if she is willing."

"What do you say, my dear?" said the King.

The Princess said nothing, but turned red as a rose, and buried her head on her father's shoulder. She was mine! I took her hand in mine and kissed it.

"*That's* settled," said the King. "And you, sir," said he to the fat young man, "what gift shall I bestow upon you?"

"A little more of the custard pie, if you please," said the fat young man.





## THE FIFTH NIGHT

### THE CITY OF DEAD LEAVES

**S**OLARIO was sitting cross-legged on his worktable, and before him, in a row, sat the Executioner, Bodkin, Bojohn, Prince Bilbo, the Princess Dorobel, and the Queen.

"This time, said Bojohn, "we want to hear the story of Montesango's Cave."

Solario shook his head. "The story is too dreadful altogether," said he. "I fear you would lie awake all night if—"

"Then tell us about the Roving Griffin," said Bodkin.

"Or the Blind Giant," said Bojohn.

"I am very curious myself," said the Princess Dorobel, "to hear the story of the seal and his sister. What do you say, mother?"

"I remember very well," said the Queen, dropping her knitting in her lap, "I saw a seal once when I was a young

girl, and a very curious creature it was, too, I'm sure. I've never forgotten it, because I was on my way to be married to your father,—of course he wasn't your father then, you know,—and I think the day I saw the seal was the day your father was expected to meet us, or the day before, I can't be quite certain now, it's so long ago; and we were waiting for him by the seashore,—but no, we weren't expecting him on that day, because he had sent a messenger to say that he couldn't start until all the horses were shod, and the blacksmith was just getting over the measles. I remember that messenger very well; a small, dark man with a beard, by the name of—what was his name? Something like Manniko, or Finnikin,—no, it was Tallboy. That was it. Tallboy. He didn't stay with the King very long after we were married, because his sister's youngest boy was taken down with the—”

“Grandmother!” said Bojohn. “Solario is waiting to go on.”

“Dear me,” said the Queen, “so he is. I'm glad I brought my knitting with me to-night.”

“I am sure,” said Prince Bilbo, “we would all be glad to hear about the seal and his sister.”

“Your will is my pleasure,” said Solario, very prettily, “and I will therefore now commence the story of—”

Here there was a sharp cry from outside the room door.

“Let me in!” piped up a voice, loud and sharp as a whistle.

Mortimer the Executioner opened the door, and at first glance there appeared to be no one there. But Bojohn cried.

out, "It's the Encourager!" And there, on the sill, was in fact the tiny figure of the Encourager, no taller than a sparrow, carrying his umbrella folded under his arm. He opened the umbrella, and leaping into the air floated up with it to the Executioner's shoulder, where, folding the umbrella again, he stood bowing to the company.

"Dear me," said the Queen, "I believe it's the Encourager of the Interrupter."

"If there's anything going on," piped up the Encourager, in his shrill voice, "I don't want to be left out!"

"Then sit down, Mortimer," said Prince Bilbo, "and let the Encourager hear the story too."

The Executioner seated himself, and the Encourager sat down on the Executioner's shoulder and gazed solemnly at Solario with his beady black eyes.

"Ahem!" said Solario, clearing his throat and picking up his shears. "I will now, with your majesty's gracious permission, proceed with the story as it was related to the assembled company at Ventamere by the seal, and by Alb the Fortunate to myself. This, then, is

"THE STORY OF TUSH THE APOTHECARY, AND OF  
PARAVAINÉ HIS SISTER."

I must tell you (said the fat young man), that I am an apothecary, and my name is Tush.

"We had a Lord Treasurer once," interrupted the Queen, "whose name was Filch. It seemed so odd."

My name is Tush; and this damsel, my sister, who was lately a Ragpicker, is known as Paravainé. So much for

that. I now proceed to the catastrophe which begins my tale, and I hope you will pardon me if I pause at times to wipe away a tear.

We were left alone at an early age, my sister and myself, without kith or kin, and we dwelt together in the city of our birth, the city of Fadz—you have heard of Fadz? A seaport of the Kingdom of Wen, a city of ships and conversation; and in that city we dwelt quietly together, and there I kept my shop.

My sister, as you may see by looking at her, was beautiful in the highest degree; and I am bound to admit to you that she was not a little vain of her beauty, and prized admiration above all things in the world. Regarding myself, I may say that I was considered to be quite handsome, though a trifle fat.

In the art of inventing remedies I greatly excelled; and I would beyond a doubt have succeeded in my profession, but that I was much given to the making of songs and the tasting of rare dishes, and these two occupations consumed the greater part of my days. My sister, on her part, applied herself so diligently to the adornment of her lovely person before the mirror, that she had scarcely time for anything else. In consequence, my business and my house fell into neglect; and another apothecary, a tuneless fellow in a neighboring street, who knew not beef from mutton, took away all my trade. But such is the fate of your true artist, the world over.

I forgot, in the application necessary for the composition of songs, the foolish moneys which I chanced to owe here



and there, and at length (so dead to the finer things of life is the coarse mind of trade), I could find no one who was willing to trust us any longer, even for the meanest knuckle of the least respectable portion of a pig. I burn with indignation when I think of it,—but I proceed.

*The Misfortunes of Tush the Apothecary*

I soon found out what monsters in the shape of men—However. Certain churls, men of no character, no elevation, no refinement,—forgive me; I am not quite myself; these men, if I may call them men, to whom I owed, I believe, some trifling sums of no account, came to my shop one morning in a body, fifteen or so; and if you can believe a thing so monstrous, they seized, they tore away, they loaded into oxcarts in the street, in the broad light of day, all the goods of my shop and all the furnishings of my house. I wept, I threatened, I raved; but all to no purpose. They answered never so much as a word; they departed, and left my sister and myself without so much as a chair to sit on, or one coin to jingle against another.

*“Now that,” said the Queen, “was going entirely too far. However did they expect the poor man to sit down?”*

One thing I entreated them to spare me, my Perfection Cream, a salve or ointment of my own invention, warranted to relieve in all cases of affliction of the skin; a remedy which I had compounded many years before, and had tried once or twice on myself with good results. Of this, having never sold any, I had on hand, in little jars, a quite considerable quantity. They left me this, with contempt; and my sis-

ter, observing it, begged them to spare to her of her own possessions one thing only, her mirror, a handglass backed with blue enamel, with a long handle of the same; and this also they granted, not without a jeer.

We sat for a long time upon the barren floor; and then we rose, and shaking the dust of the place from our feet, we departed, never to return. In a pouch at my side I carried my Perfection Cream, and in her hand my sister carried her blue mirror; and thus we went forth, to try our fortunes in the world.

We sought the wharves, designing to take ship for some distant clime; and we found, in fact, a vessel loading for a voyage. The ship's master was sitting on a bale, directing the porters, and I addressed him politely, explaining our case. He shrugged his shoulders and shook his head; but he happened to turn around and catch sight of my sister, and his manner changed. He jumped to his feet, bowed, and begged us to come aboard.

In effect, we sailed away. My heart was light again. The city faded behind us, the sunlight sparkled on the waves; and I was none the less happy because I had not the least idea where we were going. I composed a song regarding life on the ocean wave, and sang it with ecstasy, until my sister begged me to stop.

The master of the ship treated us with distinguished courtesy; I could not help contrasting his conduct with that of the cold-blooded men who had— But I resolved to think of them no more. I gave myself up to the pleasures of the voyage.

*They Find Themselves on an Unknown Shore*

On the third day, when we were sailing offshore in a light breeze, my sister came to me in tears. The master of the ship had demanded that she marry him, as the price of our passage. I went to him at once, and remonstrated with him patiently. It was no use. He was set upon marrying my sister. We left the matter to Paravaine herself, and she rejected the proposal with scorn. "You see!" said I, throwing up my hands in despair. "Yes, I see," said the mariner. "You wish to go ashore. I will not detain you any longer." The ship was brought in closer to the shore, a boat was lowered, and my sister and myself (I assure you the black-hearted scoundrel bowed to us politely to the last)—my sister and myself were landed on a sandy beach, and the ship sailed away.

*"Now isn't that a perfect shame," said the Queen. "And such a nice young man, too."*

We stood for a time in silence, petrified with despair. A vast, treeless plain stretched away beyond the beach, far as the eye could see; there was no human habitation anywhere. Not an ounce of food nor a copper coin did we have between us,—nothing but my Perfection Cream and my sister's blue mirror. We were at our wits' end.

"Let us sit down and think what we had better do," said I, and I led my sister to a brown rock embedded in the sand at no great distance. It was a large rock, round and smooth, and we sat down with our backs against it, gazing mourn-



fully at the Great Sea, where it sparkled in the sunlight. It was a beautiful sight, and I began to think up a new song.

*"I always used to say," said the Queen, "that the sea was a very pretty thing, but the King never could abide it. He used to get so sick! And he finally declared he would never put his foot on a boat as long as he— Dear me! I remember a sailor on one of our trips who had a parrot that used to talk—Oh, dear! Such things as he did say! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! When I think of them!"*

*"All right, grandmother," said Bojohn. "Go on, Solario."*

As we sat there (said the fat young man) with our backs against the brown rock, I amused myself by plucking away idly certain blades of long brown grass which fringed the lower portion of the rock near my hand; and these blades I twined, scarce thinking what I did, into a ring of a size to fit a finger. Instead of putting it on my own finger, I took my sister's hand and placed the ring, jestingly, on the first finger of her right hand.

### *The Startling Effect of Making a Ring of Grass*

No sooner was this done than a kind of groan came from the rock. The sand on which we sat heaved and shuddered. It rose beneath us, and we were lifted slowly into the air; and when we were higher than a man's height above the ground we were thrown off on to the beach, and we were looking up at a monstrous creature in the shape of a man, who had risen up under us from beneath the sand. He was chocolate brown in color, and he towered above us full seven



yards or more. The rock against which we had been sitting was, as we now perceived, his head; he had been lying, no doubt asleep, on his stomach under the sand, completely covered except for his head. We had been sitting above his buried shoulders, and leaning against the back of his head; and from this head, all bald but for a fringe of hair at the bottom, I had plucked the hairs which I had thought were grass.

"A genie!" I cried, and pulled my sister to her feet in fright.

The genie opened his mouth in a great yawn, and stretched his mighty arms; and as he breathed out again, jets of flame shot from his nostrils. He was bare, except for a wide cloth twisted around his middle from waist to thigh, and in the waistband he wore a long, curved scimitar, which flashed in the sun. He spread his hands out before him and bowed low.

"Were you asleep in the sand?" said my sister, recovering her wits first.

He bowed again.

"What do you want with us?" said my sister, becoming bolder.

"I await your commands," said the genie, in a voice like the roaring of a waterfall.

"Oh!" said my sister. "Is it the ring of hair on my finger? Is that it?"

He bowed again, extending his hands.

"Then please! please! take us away from here!" cried my sister.

"What is it you seek?" said the genie.

"We seek the best thing in the world!" cried my sister. "Take us where we may find it!"

"What do you mean by the best thing in the world?" said I to my sister.

"I don't know," said she; "but the genie ought to know, and he'll take us where we may find it. Won't you?" said she, looking up at him.

"Hearing is obedience!" said the genie, and little jets of fire spurted from his nostrils.

"Where will you take us?" said I.

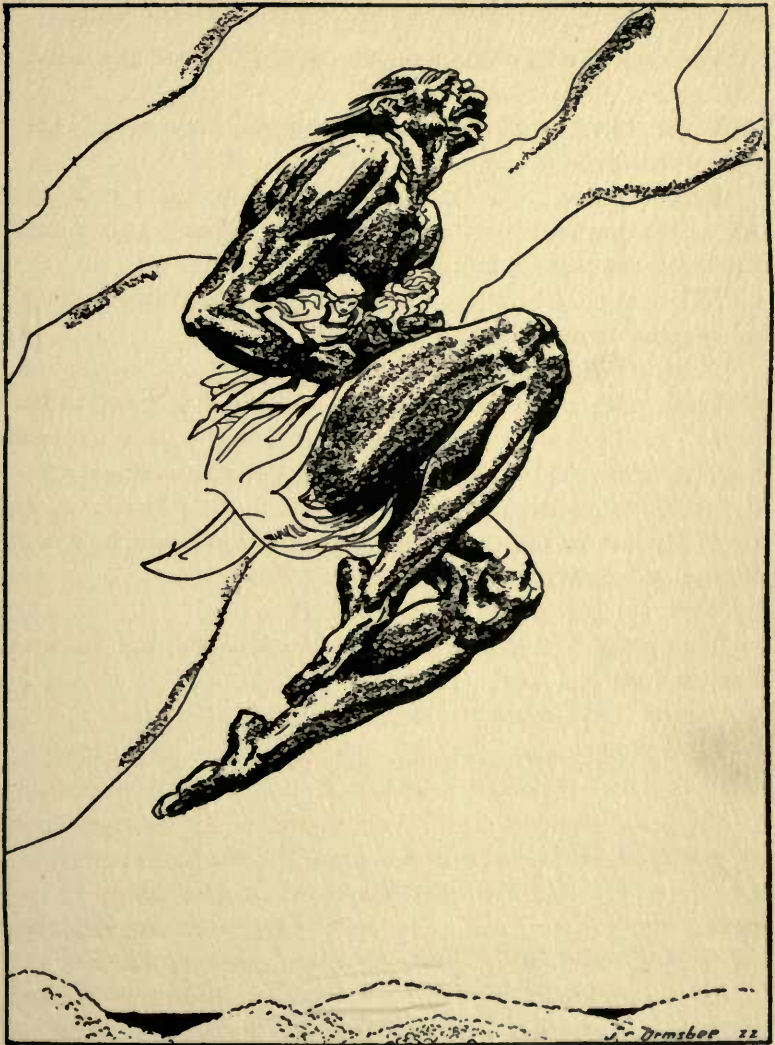
"I will take you where you may find the best thing in the world," said the genie. "And if you find it, it will be the best thing in the world for me too, because it will release me from the power of the One-Armed Sorcerer, who dwells in an island far out in the Great Sea. If you don't find it, it will be your own fault, and in that case,—beware!"

"This sounds pretty doubtful," said I.

"No matter!" cried my sister. "We will find it. Take us there at once!"

### *They Start Upon a Journey Through the Air*

The genie stooped down over us, and under his right arm he gathered me up, and under his left arm he gathered up my sister. He stamped upon the earth so that it shook, and leaped into the air; and in an instant we were soaring over the treeless plain, and I was sick with dizziness. Higher and higher we mounted, with the speed of an arrow; we seemed to be flying straight into the face of the sun; I could no



The genie flew away with Tush and his sister







longer tell which was sea and which was plain below. I closed my eyes.

It was a long time before I opened them again. We were lower, and I could see the plain, flat and grassy, without a tree. The sun declined, and still we kept our course; I thought we should soon be at the end of the world; and still there were no trees anywhere on the plain below us.

I ached in every limb; I cried out, but the genie did not hear me; and when I was ready to faint with exhaustion his speed suddenly relaxed, and I saw, at the edge of the horizon before me, what was, or seemed to be, a city. And still there were no trees.

Scarcely a moment passed before the city rose in plain view; and with a swoop the genie descended upon the earth, and we were standing, all three of us, before a gate in the city wall, and my sister was arranging her hair before her mirror.

A tall and muscular man stood beside the gate, as if on guard. He was chocolate brown in color, and he was bare except for a wide cloth twisted about his middle from waist to thigh, and in his right hand he carried a scimitar, which flashed in the sunlight. I looked around for the genie, but he was gone.

"What city is this?" said I to the Guardian of the Gate.

"It is the City of Dead Leaves," said the man. "What do you seek in the city?"

"We are seeking," said my sister, "the best thing in the world. We were told that we would find it here."

"Ah!" said the Guardian, looking at my sister. "You are

she who has come to save the King's brother. Come with me."

He led the way through the gate, and we found ourselves in an alley of high walls, along which we followed him for some distance, coming out upon an open plot of grass, surrounded by the same high walls in a circle. As we approached it, I smelled a familiar fragrance, the fragrance of orange blossoms; and I thought with some regret of the groves upon our slopes at home.

### *The Orange Tree and the Panther*

In the center of this plot was an orange tree. It was green with foliage and white with blossoms; the odor was delicious. Under the tree, prowling stealthily around it, was a panther. I drew back in alarm. "Do not go too close," said our guide. "It is death to touch the tree."

I had no desire to approach that terrible beast, and we gave him a wide berth as we proceeded around the rim of the grassplot to an opening in the opposite wall. We passed through that opening into a city street; a street of glass, as it seemed, for the front wall of every house was made of glass; and within, in every case, was a kind of storeroom, piled up with something which looked like dead leaves. In the greater houses these rooms were piled quite full; in the meaner there were only little mounds; but much or little, they appeared to be on exhibition, as if in pride.

"The treasures of our people," said the Guardian of the Gate. "Dead orange leaves. Our most precious possession. The wealth and station of each citizen are gauged by his

store of dead leaves. It is of course only proper to put them where they may be seen. But come; the King's brother awaits us."

I nudged my sister. "The King's brother!" I whispered. "Here is a chance for you!" She smiled, and glanced into her mirror.

We wound through many streets of glass, and I observed that besides glass the houses contained no material but stone and metal; the absence of wood was very noticeable. We turned down a mean street toward the city wall, and came out upon a common, strewn with refuse of all kinds, and bounded on the further side by the wall. A shelter of canvas leaned against the wall, and beneath this shelter, on a pallet of straw, lay a man in rags. He raised himself on his elbow and looked up at us.

"The King's brother," said our guide, and I started back in surprise.

### *They Come Upon the King's Brother in Rags*

He was a young man, and very ugly, but not unpleasant to look at; indeed, his ugliness had something honest and winning in it; and if he had not been so ragged, he might have made a passable appearance. As it was, I laughed to myself at the thought of such a fellow in connection with my beautiful sister.

The ugly young man stood up and bowed politely.

"Is it the first stranger?" said he to the Guardian of the Gate.

"It is," said the Guardian.

"I am content," said the young man, casting on my sister a look of admiration.

"Fair lady," he went on, dropping on one knee and taking her hand, "if you are not pledged elsewhere, I beseech you to accept me as a suitor for your hand. Stay; do not repulse me at my first word, but hear me further, and take time to consider. I am the King's younger brother; and because I would not marry a lady of his choosing, he has cast me out, swearing that I shall remain in this misery unless I shall marry the first stranger who shall come to our gates. Oh, fortunate hour that brought you here the first of all! I am poor; I do not possess a single leaf; but I will devote myself to you loyally, and I do not think you will regret it. I know, having seen you, that I cannot live without you. Do not refuse me now, but at the end of a week give me your answer."

He kissed her hand fervently, and arose. I confess that I liked this young man, but of course I could not think of marrying my sister to one so utterly forlorn. I answered for her.

"In a week I will let you know," said I, and drew my sister away.

"Before you go," said he, "let me give you a warning. Look at my hands."

He held out his palms, and I saw that they were covered with a rash, red and angry-looking. He rubbed his palms together, as if to soothe an irritation.

"The itching palms!" said he. "I have handled the dead leaves all my life; and because I have handled them my



palms itch, itch, all day and night, without ever a moment's peace. I warn you not to touch the dead leaves. The dead leaves of the orange tree; do not touch them."

"Very well," said I, and with these words we left him.

The Guardian of the Gate, leading us back into the city streets, turned and said:

"You have just had your first chance to gain the best thing in the world. I will now give you your second. Be careful how you choose."

We entered a street of shops; and I now noticed that the people were, each of them, rubbing their palms together, as if to soothe an intolerable itching.

I paused to look into one of the shops as we passed. The customers within were handing over to the dealer, in return for his goods, leaves, dead leaves, of the sort we had seen in the glass showrooms; and whenever these dead leaves passed from hand to hand, I remarked that the itching of the palm they touched became more exasperating, so that the people were quite beside themselves, and could not keep quiet on their feet; but the dealer nevertheless received the dead leaves eagerly, and the others gave them up with reluctance.

"These people are mad," said I.

We joined a great rout of people, all rubbing their hands, who were pouring down a street in the direction of an open square; and when we reached it, we saw in the center, on a platform above the heads of the crowd, a man in a robe, who was evidently about to read from a paper held in his hand.

"Your second chance," said the Guardian of the Gate. "I will leave you to your choice. Be careful how you choose."

He turned away, and disappeared in the crowd.

"Hear ye! Hear ye!" cried the man on the platform. "A message from the King! Whereas the affliction of the itching palm has now become so grievous that it can no longer be endured, the King now offers, to such person as shall cure him, one-half of all the dead leaves in his treasury! And to him also he promises one-half of all the dead leaves belonging to each person whom he shall cure! The offer is open to all! Be diligent! Thus saith the King!"

The messenger got down, and immediately there arose near the platform a commotion, with much laughter, and those in that neighborhood began to cry out:

"Way for the Lord Buffo! Make way for the wise Lord Buffo!"

### *A Dwarf Clad in Motley Stands up to Speak*

A singular figure now mounted the platform, facing in our direction. He was a dwarf, hunchbacked and thickset, with a very large head set deep in his shoulders, and arms which hung to his knees. His clothing was of squares of yellow and blue and green and orange, and on his head he wore a paper crown, rimmed around at the top with little bells. With his right hand he pulled up by a cord a small monkey, dressed in all respects like himself; and in his other hand he held the long tail feather of a cock.

"The King's Fool," said one of the bystanders in my ear.

The Fool waved the feather, and the crowd settled itself to listen.

"Hear ye! Hear ye!" he cried, in a loud, harsh voice.

At this the people shouted, "Go on, go on!"

The monkey leaped up on to the dwarf's shoulder, and the dwarf proceeded, with the greatest gravity.

"I, Buffo, chief counselor to his most gracious majesty, King Fatchaps, do call upon you to hearken to the voice of Wisdom!"

"Wisdom! That's good!" laughed the crowd,—never ceasing to rub their palms and dance up and down the while.

"First I must tell you, my loyal subjects, that you are all mad. Do you believe it?"

"Yes! yes! Of course!" shouted the crowd, still laughing.

"Give ear, and I will prove it to you! Thus! Answer me! Isn't there enough in our city for all, to feed you and clothe you and shelter you and amuse you? Answer!"

"True!" cried many persons in the throng.

"Then why are there some among you who starve, and others who cast out of their abundance to the dogs? Tell me that!"

No one replied.

"Because you are mad! With the itching palm! Look at you! You can't stand still on your feet! Rub, rub! Want in the midst of plenty! Scratch, scratch! Some with too little and some with too much! Rub, rub! And enough for everybody in reason! Scratch, scratch! All mad, all mad! Rub, rub! Look at me—have I itching palms?" He held up his hands, palms outward.

"No!" exclaimed several in the crowd.

"Tell me why! Tell me why! Because I touch not the dead leaves! Isn't it so?"

No one answered.

"Give ear, madmen, and I will reveal to you how to cure the itching palm! Bring the dead orange leaves here to the square! Pile them up! Burn them, burn them, burn them, every one! That's it! Will you give up the dead leaves?"

"No!" roared the people as if with one voice.

"Then farewell, madmen!" cried the Fool, and he jerked the monkey from his shoulder and descended from the platform.

The people, still rubbing their hands together and dancing, but laughing withal, rapidly left the square, and my sister and myself started to go; and as we started, the dwarf appeared before us with his monkey, and cocked his eye up at us waggishly.

"What, ho!" said the Fool. "Strangers, by the ears of a donkey! Greeting, strangers, what do you among my mad subjects?"

"To tell you the truth, my lord," said I, making up my mind on the spur of the moment, "I have come here with my sister from a distant land, to cure the people and their King of the itching palm."

"How so?" said the hunchback, sharply.

"With a little remedy of my own," said I, tapping my pouch.

"Bah!" said the Fool, jerking the monkey's cord. "Go home, madman, you are wasting your time."



"One moment!" I said. "Conduct me to the King, I beg you. You shall see me prove my boast."

He looked up at me sidewise. "Pouf!" said he, snapping his fingers. "Old Fatchaps is as big a fool as you are. Here; I'll give you a chance; there's nobody here to help me. I ask you, will you help me? I have a plan to gather the leaves together and burn them. With your help I can do it, and we will save the people together. Will you help?"

"Not I," said I, laughing again. "The people would tear us both to pieces."

"What does that matter?" said the Fool.

"It matters to me," said I.

"Is that your choice?" said the Fool. "You have made your choice? Done, then. Come with me. I will take you to the King; and you will wish that I hadn't. Oh, these fools! The time is coming when I must take the case in hand myself, all alone; for I will tell you a secret; lend me your ear." He pulled my head down, and whispered fiercely in my ear. "I love this people, and I will save them; whether they will or no. D'ye hear? They are my people, and they must be saved! Whether they will or no! And then what a bonfire! What a bonfire!"

He jerked the monkey's cord again, and made off swiftly. We followed him, and my sister said to me, in a low voice, "Do you think he is mad?"

"That," said I, "is precisely what I do not know."

*Buffo the Fool Leads Them to the Palace*

In a few moments we entered and crossed the grounds of an immense palace, and Buffo the Fool opened the palace door without ceremony and preceded us into a great hall, where he stopped and said:

"I must have a good look at you first. Buffino, my mirror!"

The monkey darted off down the hall and up the staircase. While he was gone the Fool said to me:

"You have seen the orange tree and the panther?"

"Yes," said I.

"Do they worship the orange tree in your country?"

"No, no," said I. "Orange trees are the commonest of our possessions. We have them by thousands. Their leaves are of no account."

"So?" said he, with a look which said that he did not believe it. "We have no tree in all this city, nor anywhere in all this land, but a single orange tree. No one knows how the seed came here. We worship that tree; nothing else."

"A very pretty sentiment," said I. "Nothing could be prettier."

"Hideous!" said he. "The leaves that drop from that tree and die are the cause of all our evil. We fight over them, we steal them, we waste our lives in getting them, and we suffer the agony of the itching palm when they are ours. Will you help me destroy the panther that guards the tree?"

"Certainly not," said I with a shiver.

"You have made your choice," said the Fool. "Buffino, give me the mirror."

The monkey, who had now returned, handed to the dwarf a large mirror, and the Fool held it up before my sister.

Instead of the beautiful person of my sister appeared in the glass the face and figure of an old woman, bent, ugly, and wrinkled. My sister started back in dismay, and the dwarf held up the mirror before myself. It showed me a gross, puffy face with three chins and pig's eyes, horribly repulsive. I shuddered.

"Just as I thought," said the Fool. "Tell me now, have you seen the King's brother?"

"Yes," said I.

"Will you marry him?" said he to my sister.

"Oh!" said she. "How could I? I can't say. I'm—"

"Just as I thought," said the dwarf. "And you won't help me cure my people. What is it you came here to seek?"

"We are seeking the best thing in the world," said I.

"And what is that?"

"I don't know; but we'll certainly recognize it when we find it."

"Not you," said the dwarf; "not until my mirror shows you fair and comely; *then* you'll know it."

"How are we to get it to show us fair and comely?" said I.

"One of you by saving a miserable outcast, and the other by saving a whole people; then you'll be fair and comely, inside and out, but not until then."

"You talk in riddles, master Buffo," said I. "Let us go to the King."

"Madman!" said the dwarf, and gave the mirror back to the monkey, who scampered off with it and disappeared.

We followed the Fool up the great staircase and into a distant wing of the palace, and stopped at a door, on which the hunchback knocked. Receiving no answer, he opened the door and led us in. "Your majesty!" he cried.

*They Find the King in a Terrible State*

The King was pacing the floor, grinding and scratching his palms together, and muttering angrily to himself. He was an enormous man with a puffy, red face, a snub nose, and three chins, and he wheezed as he walked. His hair stood up on end all over his head as if it was trying to fly off. His fat legs went back and forth in a kind of tripping run, and his fat hands rubbed and scratched and slapped each other in a perfect frenzy.

"What, what!" he cried, never halting for an instant. "What's the matter, what's the matter?"

"Stop a minute, King Fatchaps!" said the Fool. "Here's a madman come to cure your itching palms! Ha, ha!"

"What do you say? What do you say?" said the King, dancing along, back and forth.

"It is true, your majesty," said I.

"You can cure me? What do you say? You're an impostor! They're all impostors! Can you cure me? Why don't you do it then?"

"I understand," said I, "that a reward is offered—"



"Well, well? What of it?" said the King, wheezing and puffing. "Half of my dead leaves! What of it?"

"The fact is," said I, "we should prefer gold or silver."

"Impudence!" cried the King. "Gold? Silver? What do you mean? I never heard of them."

"He'll take the leaves, never fear," said the dwarf. "Oh, yes."

"Take 'em!" cried the King. "Who is the beautiful lady? Take 'em? Dead leaves or nothing! Take 'em or leave 'em!"

It was plain that a fortune of dead leaves was as good as any other, if you only thought it so, and if these people thought it so, as they evidently did, I might as well take it.

"I am satisfied, your majesty," said I, "and if you will hold out your palm, I will work the cure."

### *The Perfection Cream Is Rubbed into the Itching Palm*

The King held out his left hand as he passed, and I trotted along beside him, and drawing from my pouch one of my little jars, I applied to the King's palm, with my fingers, a small portion of my salve, rubbing it in as well as I could; and then I ran around to his other side, and did the same for his other hand. It was rather difficult, considering that I had to trot along beside him as he tripped back and forth across the carpet.

"What, what, what! Bless my soul!" cried the King, stopping suddenly. "It feels better!"

I bowed and smiled, and Buffo the Fool said, "Mad, old Fatchaps! Both of you mad!"

"Speak when you're spoken to!" said the King. "Who asked your opinion? Pfoo! pfoo! I haven't any breath left! Not another word out of you, sir! I know when I'm cured! I'm no fool, I'm no fool!"

"Oh, no, not at all!" said the Fool.

"Here, you!" said the King. "Take this young man and his wife and feed 'em, and let 'em sleep in the palace. I'll settle with 'em in the morning, if the itching's gone. I'm no fool."

"Not my wife,—my sister," said I, bowing.

"What do you say?" cried the King. "Oh, that's different!"

He bowed before my sister, and kissed her hand very respectfully.

"Bless my soul! Beautiful as a moonbeam! What do you say? Where do you come from, eh? The itching's gone. But I'll wait till morning. I'm no fool. Be off with you, clown, and let 'em eat and sleep in the palace. What do you say? He shall cure the whole city, and I'll make 'em give up half of all their dead leaves to him! In the morning, in the morning! What do you say? Be off with you!"

We hastily left him, and as we passed down the hall we saw him poke his head out of the door and heard him call:

"Ho! I'm cured! Where's that confounded chamberlain? Send me the chamberlain! What do you say? I'm cured!" And he banged the door shut again.

That night we dined sumptuously and slept in gorgeous apartments in the palace. In the morning, being once more conducted by Buffo to the King, we found him in a transport

of happiness. The cure was perfect. He kissed my sister's hand, and threw his arms about me, and cried:

"It's yours! Half of my dead leaves, and I'll make a Prince out of you! Not a word! What do you say? Never woke up once last night! Get to work and cure all my people. Where's that confounded chamberlain? Get to work, get to work!"

*Tush the Apothecary Takes the People in Hand*

The arrangements were soon made. I took my stand on the palace steps, and all day long the people filed before me, and into each palm I rubbed a little of my salve. It was a work of days, and all business stopped until my task was done. At the end, the city was cured; never were there in this world a people so beside themselves with joy.

In the square where I had first met the King's Fool the King caused to be thrown up, with five hundred pairs of willing hands, a vat of hardened mud in blocks, and into this vat his servants poured for me a good full half of all the dead orange leaves in his treasury, and on top of these, from each of those whom I had cured, one-half of his store of leaves; so that when all was done the vat was just half full. I was rich; richer than the King himself; and my Perfection Cream was all gone.

I hinted to the King that some kind of covering should be provided for the vat, to protect my riches from the weather.

"What, what?" said he, his face growing a trifle purple. "There's no rain at this time of year! What do you say? All in good time! I can't do everything in a minute!"

Now it came to pass, as you may guess, that the King grew daily more smitten with my sister's beauty. Scarcely a day passed on which he did not visit us in the splendid apartments in his palace which he had given us for our own. His favors became more lavish as time went on; they could have only one meaning. "You shall be Queen!" said I to my sister, and she smiled knowingly.

We were expecting, one evening, a visit from the King, when the Fool entered our apartment, and behind him came, instead of the King, the King's ugly brother. I was startled, for I had forgotten him completely.

He knelt beside my sister, and took her hand tenderly in his.

"Dear lady," he said, "I do not blame you that you have neglected your promise. I have stolen here at great risk to lay myself again at your feet. Surely a loyal heart must weigh with you more than rank or riches. Ah, dear lady, say that you will be mine!"

I confess that there was something about this young man which made me like him better than before; but of course a match such as he proposed was out of the question.

My sister shook her head and drew away her hand. "I cannot, I cannot," she said.

"Tell me," he said, "do you think well of me—do you care for me a little—do you think you can say you love me, ever so little?"

"I do! I do!" cried my sister, to my amazement, hiding her face in her hands. "I loved you on the first day I saw you! I can't help it! I do!"



"Ah, then," said the young man, rising, while I on my part remained speechless with astonishment, "what's to hinder? You are mine!"

"No, no," said my sister, weeping, "it can never be."

"Is it because I am poor and friendless?"

My sister said never a word.

"Is it because you prize rank and wealth more than love?"

Still my sister said nothing.

The young man hesitated, and stooping to kiss her hand, he said, "I have received my answer;" and with these words he strode mournfully to the door. But she did not look up at him, and with a sigh of deep grief he left us.

### *Paravaine Has Made Her Choice*

"The wrong choice once more," said the Fool, and he, too, went his way.

My sister had hardly dried her eyes when there came a knock upon the door behind her, and the King entered. She did not turn round, and the King tripped in silently on his toes, putting a finger roguishly to his lips and shaking all over with mirth; and coming up behind her he placed his two fat hands over her eyes, wagging his eyebrows up and down at me.

"Guess who it is!" he cried, wheezing. "What do you say? It's somebody come a-wooing! Never mind who! Ha, ha, ha! Guess who it is, and to-morrow you'll be Queen! What do you say? Pouf! Pah! I'm all out of breath. It's somebody that wants you to be his Queen. Guess! The most beautiful Queen in the whole—"

He stopped suddenly. The King's Fool and his monkey had slipped into the room behind him and were standing before my sister, and the dwarf was holding up his mirror before my sister's face.

"What, what, what!" cried the King in a rage, taking away his hands from my sister's eyes. "What do you mean? Out of my sight, Fool! Away! Begone!"

The dwarf held the mirror higher, shaking with laughter the while, and my sister gazed into it. I saw her shudder and turn pale, and then she screamed and buried her face in her hands.

The King, staring likewise into the mirror, turned purple and remained as if frozen with horror. He shook himself, and gave a choking gasp.

"What's this?" he cried. "It's the—what a— Take it away. She's an old woman! She's a witch! What a—I'm no fool, it's a trick, I knew it all the time! Take her away! She's an old woman. You can't play tricks on me, I won't have it, I won't stand it. She's a witch! I'm going. I won't stay. It's a trick. I'm no fool!"

With these words, puffing and wheezing, he trotted on his fat legs out of the room.

"No marriage yet," said the Fool, looking at me queerly, and he ran after the King, pulling his monkey along with him.

### *He Finds Himself Rubbing His Palms Together*

That night, as I stood before my mirror, undressing, and comforting myself with the thought of all the magnificence

I had acquired and would acquire with my dead orange leaves, I found myself rubbing the palm of my right hand with the fingers of my left. I was aware of a slight itching in the palm.

At breakfast in the morning, I noticed that my sister, who was very sober, would now and then scratch the palm of her right hand; but I said nothing, and in the afternoon, without questioning her on the subject of her love for the King's brother, I prepared to visit the King, to try if I could not bring him back to reason. I was ready to leave, when my sister broke into my room, crying out frantically:

"I can't stand it, I can't stand it! The itching in my palms! It won't stop for a moment! I can't sit still! It's growing worse and worse! Oh, brother, cure it, cure it, or I shall go mad!"

She walked up and down the room in a frenzy, rubbing her palms together. I tried in vain to pacify her, and at length I left her and betook myself to the King.

On my way the itching of the night before returned, and this time I felt it in both my hands. I knew that my sister and myself, in common with the King and all his subjects, had been handling the dead leaves freely since I had worked the cure, and I began to be uneasy.

When I knocked at the King's door the voice of the Fool said "Come in," and I found the King running with his tripping step up and down the room, rubbing his hands, and beside him trotted the Fool and the monkey.

"Imbecile!" cried the King, without stopping for an instant. "You shall die the death! A trick, a trick! And

half of my dead leaves gone for nothing! A death in boiling oil! What do you say? Don't answer me! My hands, my hands! Worse than before! You shall suffer, you shall suffer! A slow death! Why don't you speak? What are you going to do?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Fool. "He's been handling the dead leaves again, and so have you all. It'll be my turn soon! My turn soon!"

"Patience, your majesty," said I, rubbing my hands. "I will go to work at once and prepare more of my salve. Have no fear. I will cure you instantly. I am off to my work."

### *He Cannot Find the Ingredients for Making the Salve*

"Pouf! Pah!" said the King, angrily, and I ran from the room, to find the ingredients necessary for my salve. But alas, they were not to be found. I sent everywhere; the city was scoured; but it was no use; I was in despair. Such simples as could be found I gathered together, and of these I made a new remedy,—far different from my old, but it was the best I could do. I tried it on myself, and felt an almost instant relief. I shouted with joy.

I returned to the King, and as I passed an open window in the great hall I heard the muttering of many voices outside, and I saw a great concourse of people in the palace grounds, all talking angrily, and all rubbing their hands and dancing on their toes in anguish. They began to shout my name, and I knew that if I should fall among them in their present temper I should be lost.



The King was trotting up and down as before, and the dwarf and the monkey were running along beside him.

"What, what?" he cried. "What now? No tricks! I'm no fool. What's the matter?"

"If I cure you," said I, holding up my box of ointment, "I must have the rest of your leaves; and from every one I cure I must have the rest of his; it is only just."

"Anything!" cried the King. "You can't do it! It's another trick! I'll give all the dead leaves in the city to anyone who can save me and my people! It's a trick! You can't do it. What are you waiting for? Try it! Oh, these hands! It's no use! Hurry up!"

I seized his hand, and running beside him I rubbed into his palm a little of my new ointment; and running around to his other side I did the same for his other hand.

"See the madmen!" cried the Fool, clapping his hands in glee.

"By the beard of my uncle!" cried the King. "I feel better! It's going! It's gone! It's all over! I'm cured! Oh, wonderful young man, come to my arms! What do you say? I knew you could do it all the time. I'm cured!"

He grasped my arm and pulled me from the room, and down the stairway to the front door. A great throng filled the grounds, from the door to the gate; and commanding silence, the King announced in a loud voice that I was ready with my cure, and that whoever wished to be cured should give up the remainder of his dead leaves.

There was a moment's hesitation, but the anguish of their affliction was too great; the people whispered together,

doubtless remarking that they would soon get back their leaves in trade; and at any rate they began to file before me, and my healing work commenced; but not before I had applied my salve, in sight of all, to my sister's palms, and given her immediate relief.

All that day and the next and for several days the work continued, and in each case the itching vanished at once; the city was cured again, and my vat in the public square was filled to the brim, with all the dead orange leaves that the people owned. The glory of my future was beyond calculation; my sister, I resolved, should yet be Queen; and I planned for myself such offices in the state as should give me power even greater than the King's.

When I awoke in my bed on the following morning, I found that I was rubbing my hands.

I dressed hurriedly, and my sister came to me in tears. She was rubbing her hands.

We hurried to the King. He was running up and down, rubbing his hands.

We fled from him and ran out upon the palace steps, not knowing where next to go; and as we stood there, hesitating, the King's brother appeared before us, and spoke with excitement.

"Beloved!" he cried. "We love each other—what more is needed? Quick, it is not yet too late! Say that you love me—let me hear it again!"

"Ah, yes, I do," said my sister, and he threw his arm about her and clasped her to his breast.

"Come! I will save you!" he cried. "There is time, if we hurry. Will you come with me now?"

My sister drew back a little, still struggling within herself; and while she hesitated, a commotion arose at the gate, and the young man cried out, in a voice full of despair:

"It is too late, too late!"

*Tush and His Sister are Seized by the Angry Crowd*

At the gate a throng of people were pressing in with angry shouts. They made toward us, dancing and rubbing their hands. They surrounded us; they crowded upon us to suffocation; the young man and myself tried in vain to shield my sister; angry hands were laid upon her and upon myself, and we were hustled away toward the gate.

"Give us back our leaves! Kill them both! To the square!" shouted the mob; and thrusting the King's brother aside they pulled and pushed us to the public square, and halted us beneath the vat which contained all my wealth.

A sudden outcry, followed by silence, drew my attention upward. There above us, on the rim of the vat, stood the King's Fool. He held a lighted torch aloft in his hand.

"Madmen!" he cried. "I am ready to cure you! All alone! Speak! Shall I destroy the leaves?"

"No, no!" shouted the crowd. "Stop him! Stop him!"

"If you fire the leaves, we will kill these two!" shouted one of our captors.

"Oh!" said my sister at my side, pale with terror. "What shall we do? Stop him! If the genie would only come and help us! I wish the genie were here to help us!"

"The time has come!" cried the Fool. "I must save you! Why will you all be mad? I must save you from your madness! In with the torch!"

He faced about toward the center of the vat, and swung his torch as if about to toss it in; but at that instant a great wind swept across the square with a roar, such a blast as I had never in my life known before, and the King's Fool tottered in it for a moment, and his torch went out; and then, clutching at the air, he was blown headlong to the ground in a heap.

"The whirlwind! The whirlwind!" shouted the crowd in terror. "Fly! Fly for your lives!"

Far off across the housetops appeared a yellow cloud, and a saffron gloom overspread the city. From the cloud to the ground revolved a yellow funnel, as of dust-laden wind; and it was coming toward us with the speed of lightning.

The crowd dispersed madly, trampling one another, shrieking and cursing, and in a twinkling they were gone. I seized my sister and dragged her to the street corner, where I opened one half of a cellar door and plunged down with her, closing the door over us, but peeping out through a crack. We were just in time.

### *The Genie in the Whirlwind*

The whirling funnel of wind and dust swept over the square; and in the forefront of it, at a great height, flew the genie, his great mouth open, and darts of fire flickering around his face.

The square was empty, save for the crumpled body of the



King's Fool, lying motionless beside the vat of dead leaves; and as I gazed at him where he lay, I saw, moving toward him across the bare pavement, the humped figure of his little monkey.

The genie, far above, kept just ahead of the whirlwind; the yellow funnel whirled after him directly across the vat and covered it and passed; and as it passed, all the dead leaves surged up into it in a furious gale, so that it was darkened with them; and the next moment the whirlwind was gone, and the square lay quiet in the sunshine.

"Come, Paravaine!" said I, and pulled my sister forth across the square.

We came to the base of the vat, and on the ground beside it, left there untouched by the storm, lay the King's Fool on his side, graver than he had ever been in his life; and huddled against his breast sat his monkey, shivering, and looking up at us with eyes that seemed to reproach us.

We hurried toward the city gate. Many houses were in ruins, and the streets were strewn with rubbish. People were running busily about, gazing intently at the ground, and now and then one would stoop and pick up something. I saw what it was they were doing; they were searching for dead leaves, scattered by the whirlwind.

"I can't go!" said my sister, weeping. "I must see him first! Oh, my love, my love!"

"Too late now!" I cried. "Too late, too late!"

I pulled her onward, knowing that death awaited us in that city; and we came to the plot of grass where we had seen the sacred tree. It was gone, and in the place where

it had been was only a gaping hole. The whirlwind had passed that way. On the ground beside the hole lay the panther, its head on its paws. It watched us with sleepy eyes as we fled by.

In a moment we had reached the city gate and passed out. The Guardian was standing there, his face clouded with a frown, and his scimitar raised.

"Why do you flee?" said he.

"From the wrath of the people!" I cried. "Let us pass!"

"You cannot pass," said he. His scimitar glittered in the sun.

"But we repent! We repent!" cried my sister.

"Too late, too late!" said the Guardian. "See!"

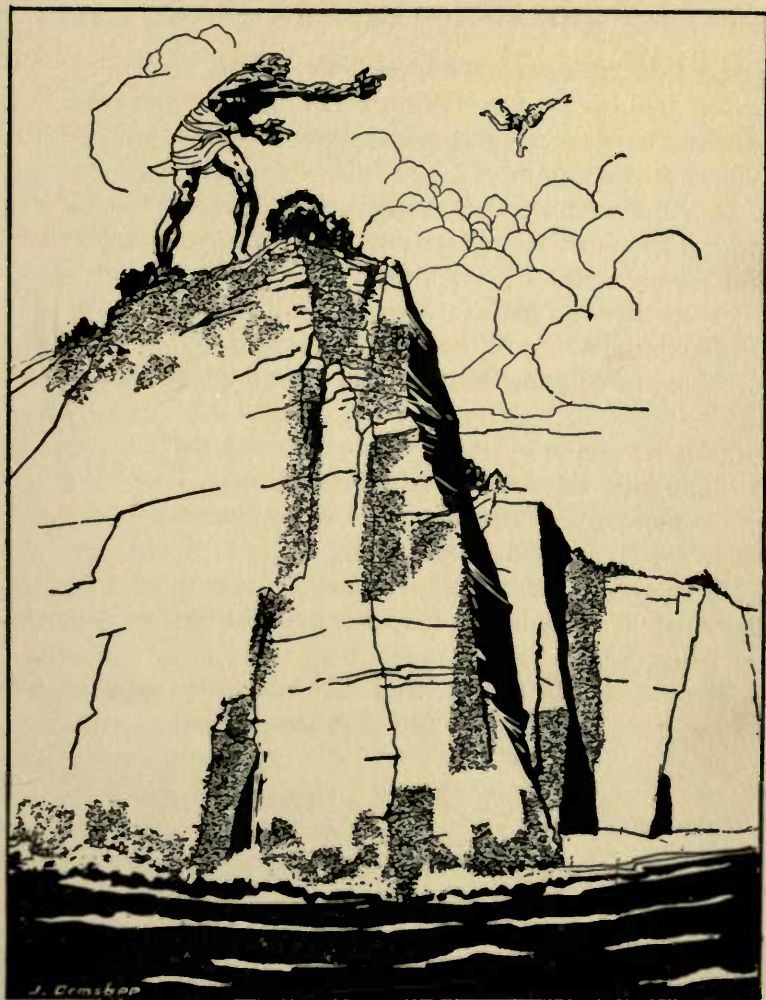
He pointed upward, and afar off in the sky appeared a black speck, speeding toward us.

"The genie!" I cried; and I had no sooner said it, than the earth trembled, and before us on the ground towered the genie, breathing fire.

"Save us from him!" I cried, turning to the Guardian, but he was gone. We were alone with the genie.

### *The Pulling Off of the Genie's Ring*

"Off with the ring! That will send him away!" I cried to my sister, and she tugged at the ring on her forefinger, to pull it off; but it came unwillingly; and as she pulled, her finger lengthened; she tugged harder, and as the ring came her finger stretched out longer and longer; and when the ring was off and dropped on the ground, the first finger of



The genie swung him back and forth and tossed him out to sea







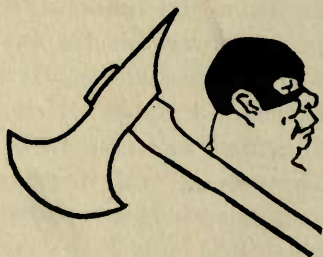
her right hand was more than a foot long,—a black, stiff rod, hooked at the end like a poker.

The genie stooped, and gathered me under his right arm and my sister under his left; and giving a stamp upon the ground which shook the earth he mounted into the air. . . .

Far out over the Great Sea, as the sun was setting, the genie drew downward toward an island; and on a bluff of this island, overlooking a cove in which fishing boats lay moored, he alighted and set us on our feet. Over my sister's head and back he passed his hand, speaking strange words in his throat. She shriveled before my eyes; her face became old and wrinkled and her body bent; and before I could speak she was the hideous creature I had seen in the Fool's glass, with a forefinger like the poker of a ragpicker.

"Paravaine!" I cried; but the genie turned her away toward a village which showed itself at the back of the cove, and sent her off in that direction; and when she had gone, he picked me up in his mighty hands, and carrying me to the further edge of the bluff where it looked down on the rolling surf, he swung me back and forth three or four times and tossed me out to sea.

I sank into the depths; I rose to the surface; and as my head came up I looked for the genie. Far up in the evening sky flew what seemed a tiny, black arrow. I cried aloud; and instead of a shriek there came from my throat a bark. It was the bark of a seal.



## THE SIXTH NIGHT

### THE ENCHANTED HIGHWAYMAN

**M**ORTIMER the Executioner, very grand and uncomfortable in his new suit, placed a chair for the Queen before Solario's worktable, and the old tailor having seated himself cross-legged on the table, the entire company sat down in a row, facing him.

There were first the Executioner, with the tiny Encourager on his shoulder; then Bodkin; then Bojohn; then his mother, the Princess Dorobel, and his father, Prince Bilbo; and last, his grandmother, the Queen.

"Now then," said Bojohn, "I hope we're going to hear the story of Montesango's Cave at last."

"If it please your majesty," began Solario, addressing the

Queen,—but at this moment there came a loud knock at the door.

Mortimer the Executioner hastened to open it, and there in the doorway stood the King himself. Solario sprang down from his table, and all the others rose.

"Ah! your majesty!" cried Solario, bowing profoundly. "This is indeed an honor!"

"I was told I would find you here," said the King. "It seems that my entire family deserts me in the evening, and I am obliged to climb the worst stairs in the castle to— But of course if you find my society too—"

"My dear!" said the Queen. "We have been listening to Solario's stories, and you were so taken up with your chess that we thought you wouldn't care to—"

"Why not?" said the King. "But of course if you don't want me to hear the stories, I'll—"

"Sit down, grandfather!" cried Bojohn. "He's just going to begin."

"Do sit down, my dear," said the Queen. "Don't you remember the story he told us the first night?"

"Hum! Ha! I'm all out of breath with those plaguey stairs. Something about a button, wasn't it?"

"Perhaps," said Prince Bilbo, "he'll tell us to-night how the magic doublet came to be—"

"Well," said the King, "if it isn't a long story— Is it a long story?"

"No, no, your majesty," said Solario, bowing again, "it is quite short."

"Hum!" said the King. "If you're sure it's not a long

story—*Why don't you begin?*" and he sat down in the Executioner's chair.

Solario took his place cross-legged on the table again, and the others resumed their seats before him,—all except the Executioner, who stood, with the Encourager on his shoulder, behind the King.

"My dear," said the Queen, "did you give the orders for locking the castle for the night?"

"I believe I usually attend to that," said the King. "Solario, proceed."

"If it is your pleasure," said Solario, fingering his shears, "I will now relate to you the story concerning the magic doublet, as it was told to the Black Prince by his father the King of Wen, and by the Black Prince to me. The King of Wen, having directed his son regarding his mission to the City of Oogh, placed the doublet in his son's left hand, and thus commenced what I may call

"THE STORY OF THE ENCHANTED HIGHWAYMAN."

"I thought," interrupted Bojohn, "you were going to tell us the story of the magic doublet."

"I am about to do so," said Solario. "As I was saying, the King of Wen, placing the magic doublet in his son's left hand, thus commenced

"THE STORY OF THE ENCHANTED HIGHWAYMAN."

When I was a young man (said the King of Wen), I left my father's castle one morning for a day's hunting in the forest. Late in the afternoon it chanced that I had wan-



dered away from my attendants, and being warm and weary I threw myself down upon the moss to rest. I had lain there but a moment when I saw, not far off among the trees, a fine buck, the only game I had come upon that day. I crept cautiously in his direction, and soon came within easy bowshot of him; but just as I was fitting my arrow to the string he tossed his head and trotted off into the forest and disappeared.

I made off after him as fast as I could, marking his trail by a broken branch here and there and an occasional hoof-print in the damp earth, and presently I found myself deep in a considerable thicket of underwood, and from this thicket I came out, to my surprise, upon a forest road.

*A Voice from Nowhere Bids the Prince Stop*

I stood for a moment looking up and down curiously. The deer was nowhere to be seen. The road was arched in a charming manner by the branches of the trees, and at no great distance lost itself in the shadowy forest. I wondered that I had never heard of this road before, and after pondering this for a moment I began to cross the road, looking carefully for the deer's tracks in the dust. I saw no trace of him, and I was about to push into the forest on the other side, when suddenly a voice, a low but clear voice, said distinctly in my ear, "Stop!"

I looked about me, but I could see no one. There was positively no living creature near me,—unless I except a wasp which at the moment was flying about my head, and which I struck away with my hand.

I walked down the road some twenty paces, peering about for the person who had spoken, and becoming more and more perplexed; and as I was about to enter the forest the same voice, still low but quite distinct, spoke again close into my ear: "Stop!"

I stopped in bewilderment. The forest was silent as the sky; no living creature, not even a bird, could I see anywhere; there was nothing;—nothing, indeed, except the wasp which was still flying about my head and which now began to annoy me exceedingly.

I went on again, striking out at the wasp, and in a moment (I assure you I began to doubt my senses), the same voice spoke again, this time close into my left ear.

"Stop! Just a moment!" it said. "Look, if you please! On your left shoulder!"

I craned my neck about, and there was nothing on my left shoulder except the wasp. The wasp was there, indeed, and I made as if to brush him off; but the voice said, "Don't, if you please!" and I stayed my hand.

You may imagine that I was more astonished than ever. I gazed at the wasp intently, and as I did so the voice began to murmur, in a kind of rapid, buzzing drone, into my left ear.

"Mercy on us!" I cried. "It's the wasp that's talking!"

It was true, beyond a doubt. "Yes!" said the voice. "Please listen! If you'd only be so good—I really wish you would!"

*The Prince Listens to a Curious Discourse*

I stood perfectly still in the roadway, and I know that my mouth hung open as I listened. The wasp buzzed into my ear a kind of rapid, droning song, so low that I had to strain my attention a little to catch it all, and these were the words I heard:

"I know it's rude to speak to you, it's something I but seldom do,  
to speak before I'm spoken to,

Or buttonhole a stranger;

Excuse me if I do not pause to think just now of social laws, I can  
not spare the time, because

I'm in the gravest danger;

In gravest danger, yes, it's true, I'm sure I don't know what I'll  
do, I'll positively die if you

Refuse me your assistance;

Come, follow me without delay, I pray you do not say me nay,  
it's life or death,—and anyway

It's scarcely any distance.

"My lot is sad in the extreme, I really am not what I seem,  
I once was held in high esteem

By every friend and neighbor:

A man entirely free of guile, who lived but in his children's smile,  
and kept them all in modest style

By hard and patient labor,

A man of pleasing manners who, whatever other men might do,  
spoke seldom unless spoken to,

A practice much commended;

My trade in such a way I plied upon the highway far and wide  
(I say it with a modest pride)

I scarcely once offended.

"It used to be my pleasant way (it always made my work seem play) to take the air from day to day,—

Unless, of course, 'twas raining,—

Upon the road to watch and wait from early morn to rather late,  
but always coming home by eight

(Such was my early training),

I used to watch and wait, I say, and when a trav'ler came my way,  
which happened every other day

Unless too cold or sunny,

I never spoke a word, not I, I merely breathed a patient sigh,  
and held my trusty blade on high

And took from him his money.

"'Twas thus I kept my children ten, a decent, worthy citizen,  
the happiest of mortal men

My humble sphere adorning,

The father of ten daughters fair who needed tons of clothes to wear,  
and that was why I took the air

Upon the road each morning,

But oh, alas for them and me, it's over now, as you may see,  
and you are incontestably

Our only hope remaining;

And all our truly dreadful plight is just because one rainy night  
I simply for a moment quite

Forgot my early training.

"'Twas rainy and 'twas after eight, I knew that I was out too late,  
but when your trade's in such a state

You hardly know what cash is,

You cannot stop because you get your feet all muddy, cold and wet,  
I knew I should be ill, and yet,—

My children needed sashes.

I shivered with the wet and cold, I counted twenty times all told  
I'd meant to have my shoes half-soled

And still they'd not been cobbled,





"I held my trusty blade on high  
And took from him his money"



## HIS TALES OF THE MAGIC DOUBLET 213

'I'll certainly,' I thought, 'be sick,'—and then from out the darkness thick an ancient woman with a stick  
In fearsome silence hobbled.

"She was an ancient, crooked crone, an ugly thing of skin and bone, she passed me silent as a stone  
(I thought it rather funny),

But I could hear my children cry, 'Oh, buy us ribbons, father, buy,'  
and stopping her, my blade on high,  
I shouted, 'Stand! Your money!'

Ah, that was just where I did make a most unfortunate mistake,  
for she with mirth began to shake  
(It made my blood run colder),

And up she raised her crooked staff, she gave a most unearthly laugh,  
a thing I did not like by half,  
And touched me on the shoulder.

"She stood, she looked me through and through, she said not even  
'How d'ye do,' she merely gave a laugh or two,  
And munched her gums together:

A witch, a sorceress of the wood! I nearly fainted where I stood,  
I really truly think you could  
Have felled me with a feather.

A witch, as sure, as sure could be! You see what she has done to me!  
And all because I carelessly  
Forgot my early training.

From which you learn this lesson true, that it will never, never do to speak before you're spoken to  
Or stay out when it's raining."

The voice stopped, and the wasp flew off, directly before my nose, as if leading me away.

*"Why, dear me!" interrupted the Queen. "I believe this wasp was nothing more nor less than a Highwayman."*



*"What I don't understand is," said the King, "how a Highwayman could have learned to make up verses."*

*"In the Forest of Wen, your majesty," said Solario, "the Highwaymen always talked in that fashion. It was their regular custom. I am told that no Highwayman could get his certificate until he had passed an examination in arithmetic, swordplay, and composition; and of course composition included verse making."*

*"Well," said the King, "I don't see what that had to do with making a good Highwayman of him; but then I don't pretend to understand these notions about education. As far as I'm concerned, if I had to pass an examination in arithmetic in order to be a King, I'd simply have to look about for something else to do. I never could see the sense in teaching a King arithmetic, and I don't see the sense in teaching a Highwayman how to make verses. I know it's done in some places; it's gotten to be quite the thing, I understand that perfectly well; but I don't see any sense in it."*

*"My dear," said the Queen, "you mustn't forget that a Highwayman has to know a great deal more than a King. It's so very much harder to be a good Highwayman. But I don't think I should like to be married to one."*

*"This one was a widower, evidently," said the King. "I know I shouldn't like to be a widower with ten daughters on my hands. I don't see how any human being could keep ten daughters in ribbons and—"*

*"When Dorobel was little," said the Queen, "I always had the most terrible time to make her remember that she mustn't speak until she was spoken to. I don't wonder the*



poor man forgot it, when he was so worried about sashes for his dear children,—and out so late at night, and in the rain, too!”

“Why don’t you let the man go on with his story?” said the King. “We’ll never get to bed at this rate. Solario, be kind enough to proceed.”

The wasp flew off (said the King of Wen), directly before my nose, as if leading me away; and I followed him down the road.

We had gone about a mile, when the wasp turned off into the forest. I hesitated a moment, but I was curious to know what this unfortunate Highwayman intended, and I pushed on after him into a portion of the forest which was wilder and gloomier than any I had yet seen. The branches of the trees hung low, and the ground was thick with underbrush; I had to part the bushes and branches with my hands in order to get through.

The wasp flew within a foot of my nose, and I kept on after him thus for more than half an hour. He seemed to know the way, but for my part I began to wonder whether I should ever be able to find my way back. Suddenly he flew off, and I saw him no more.

### *The Prince, Alone in the Forest, Hears the Bark of a Dog*

I was at this moment in an uncommonly thick part of the forest. The trees were perhaps less close, but the underbrush was taller; so tall that I could not see through. I stopped for a moment, and listened. All was still. Not a bird twittered among the leaves overhead. I was vexed

that I had allowed myself to be drawn upon such a wild-goose chase, and I decided that I had better begin to make my way back to the road; and as I was considering this, I heard the bark of a dog.

It was a single, sharp bark, and it stopped abruptly, as if a hand had been clapped over the animal's mouth. I listened again, but it came no more. "What should a dog be doing here?" I thought; and full of curiosity I pushed on through the underbrush in the direction of the sound. In a moment I had broken through the tanglewood, and I was standing at the edge of a clearing, in the midst of which was a little house.

It was a very tiny house indeed,—not much more, in fact, than a hut. Its door was closed, and the window beside the door was barred with shutters. I listened intently, thinking to hear again the bark of a dog, but I heard nothing. Evidently the place was deserted.

I crossed the open space before the door, and as I did so I noticed, clinging to the trunk and lower branches of a tree at the side of the clearing, what appeared to be a wasp's nest; but an enormous wasp's nest, big enough, in all conscience, to contain a man if need be; a wasp's nest greater than I should have thought could exist in the world. I looked at it curiously, and coming nearer I saw, crawling over it, a number of wasps. I counted them, and there were eleven.

They arose with one accord and flew in great agitation about my head; and at the same time I heard a voice from inside the wasp's nest,—the voice of a human being, but not

the one I had already heard; a voice much stronger and louder. I put my ear against the wasp's nest, and from within came these words:

"Don't speak before you're spoken to!"

"Who is it?" I said. "Where are you?"

"Beware the dog!" said the voice again.

"But who—what—?" I began.

*The Prisoner Inside the Wasp's Nest*

"I can't get out! I'm imprisoned inside the wasp's nest! Do as you're bid, and don't speak before you're spoken to. Beware the dog!"

At this moment I heard the click of a latch, and I turned round in time to see the door of the hut open.

In the doorway was standing an old woman, and by her side a dog. She was a hideous old crone, wrinkled and bent, with little, beady eyes and a hooked nose and no teeth. She stood there munching her gums and blinking her eyes at me, and I noticed that she wore about her neck a string of what looked like ivory buttons, ten of them, white and flat.

With her left hand she leaned on a crooked stick, and with her right hand she held, by a leather thong, the biggest and fiercest-looking dog I had ever seen in my life. His head came nearly to the old woman's shoulder. He was chocolate brown in color, and his skin was entirely naked of hair, except for a patch of long wiry hair which fringed his neck. He bared his sharp, white teeth at me and growled. I felt decidedly uneasy.

The eleven wasps were flying about my head in violent agitation. The old woman said nothing, but continued to blink at me and munch her gums. Suddenly the dog barked, and without a word the old woman flung the thong from her hand. The dog gave a bound toward me and crouched for a spring, growling and bristling. In another instant I knew that I would be torn to pieces. I started back and cried out in alarm.

"Call him off!" I shouted. "Stop him! Call him off!"

At these words, a groan came from inside the wasp's nest. At the same time one of the eleven wasps, which were flying directly before my face, dropped to the ground at my feet as if dead. I realized that I had spoken before being spoken to, and one of the wasps—one of the Highwayman's daughters, in fact,—had suffered for my error. But the worst consequence was now to come.

The old woman shook her stick and danced up and down in hideous glee.

"He's spoken!" she cried. "Ha! ha! Spoken before he was spoken to! He's done for himself now! At him, dog, he's helpless! Seize him, dog, destroy him!"

### *The Dog Leaps Upon Him to Devour Him*

Before I could turn, the dog was upon me. No man on earth could have stood up under such an attack. With one leap he was upon my breast, and bore me to the ground; and as I fell his sharp teeth sank into my shoulder, and I nearly fainted with pain and terror.

"A hair of the dog that bit you!" It was the voice from



within the wasp's nest, and it was crying: "A hair of the dog that bit you!"

My senses were slipping away, and I hardly knew what I did; but somehow or other I put my hand on the beast's neck, and plucked from it a long hair; and as I did so the dog bounded away from me and stood cowering and quivering, as if in fear.

"At him!" screamed the witch—for it was a witch, beyond a doubt; and she rushed upon the dog and began to beat him violently with her stick. "At him again!" she screamed, but to my amazement the dog turned upon her, snarling; and at that moment the voice came again from the wasp's nest, and it cried:

"A ring of the hair! Make a ring of the hair for your finger!"

I sat up and quickly wound about my finger, in a ring, the hair which I had plucked from the dog's neck. The effect of this was startling. The witch shrieked, plainly in terror, and sprang away from the dog; and the brute came to me and cringed before me on the ground and whined; and behold, all the pain was gone from my shoulder.

"Command him to be himself again!" cried the voice from the wasp's nest.

"Be yourself again!" I cried, not knowing what I said.

*The Prince, Sitting on the Ground, Looks Up at a Genie*

Instantly, in the flash of an eye, the dog was gone; and in his place stood, towering above me full seven yards or more, a monstrous creature in the shape of a man, chocolate

brown in color, baldheaded except for a fringe of long hair at the base of his skull, and bare except for a cloth twisted about his middle, in which hung a gleaming scimitar. It was a genie. He was panting with anger or some other strong emotion, and as he panted jets of fire shot forth from his nostrils. His mighty chest heaved, and I shrank back in alarm; but he spread out his hands and bowed low before me. I remembered the ring of hair on my finger, and grew bolder.

The witch was creeping quietly away, stick in hand, toward the door of her hut; but as she reached it the genie stooped and caught her in his hand and held her fast. I sprang to my feet.

"Set free your victims!" I cried to her. "The wasps and the prisoner inside the nest! Release them! or by the power of the genie's hair, I will command him to destroy you!"

She kicked and squirmed and shrieked, but all in vain. There was no escaping from that terrible grasp. She grew quiet, and began to mutter to herself. "I will count ten," I cried, "and if at the tenth—" But she did not wait for me to count. With one look up at the genie's face she waved her crooked stick in the air and began to pour out strange words, and then, giving a despairing cry, she let the stick fall to the ground; and as it touched the ground, there came from the wasp's nest—I assure you it was an extraordinary sight—I scarcely know how to tell you, it all happened so quickly—

*The One-Armed Sorcerer Appears from Within the Wasp's Nest*

Well, the wasp's nest opened from top to bottom, and inside it was sitting a young man, who leaped down with a laugh and stood before me, bowing. I noticed that he had but one arm, the left; his eyes were blue, and his skin was fair and rosy; and he wore a long blue gown spangled with silver stars.

*The Highwayman and Nine of His Daughters Appear in Proper Person*

Almost at the same instant there were standing before me nine young maidens, all of extraordinary beauty; and in their midst an elderly man with a gray beard and a long thin face, and spindly legs. The nine maidens were gazing at an object on the ground, and the elderly man looked down at it also, and they all began to wring their hands together and moan.

"Oh!" said the elderly man, sniffing,—

"Just see what he has gone and done, he can't deny it, he's the one, he ought to hide his head where none  
     Could ever look upon it,  
 He knew, he did, he surely knew, I told him it would never do  
 to speak before you're spoken to,  
     And now he's gone and done it."

"I warned him," said the one-armed young man, "but he was frightened, and he forgot."

"Oh, yes," said the elderly man, wiping his tears away with the back of his hand,—

"Oh, yes, it's well enough to say it slipped his mind a bit to-day and in an absent sort of way

He slew my darling daughter;

But that will hardly, hardly do, I really can't agree with you, it's simply from my point of view

A case of plain manslaughter."

"Oh, sister! sister!" cried the nine maidens. "Isn't it terrible? It's too terrible! It is terrible, isn't it?"

"Let me go!" screamed the witch, struggling in the hand of the genie.

### *He Sees the Highwayman's Tenth Daughter*

I pushed into the group around the elderly Highwayman, and there at his feet I saw what made my heart stand still with grief and remorse. On the ground was lying a maiden, far lovelier than any of the others; and she was dead. Her eyes were closed, her face was pale, she did not breathe; and her hair lay about her like a shower of gold. Alas, that my carelessness had brought her to this sorrowful end! If she had only lived! How I should have rejoiced to be her friend, and in the course of time, perhaps, persuade her to smile upon me—Alas! alas! At that moment, if she could but have cast one look upon me, I would have laid at her feet all that I—

I knelt beside her and took her cold hand in mine. I stooped over her, and in an excess of pity, and of more, far more than pity, I kissed her softly on the lips.



Oh, wonderful! Her eyelids quivered. A faint flush came into her cheeks. Her eyes opened, and she looked straight into my own. She smiled, and it was like the evening sky after rain. I put my arm beneath her shoulder, and helped her to stand up. She rubbed her eyes and swayed a little, and I kept my arm about her. We gazed at each other, smiling.

"Is it—?" said she.

"It is, beloved!" I cried, and folded her, unresisting, to my heart.

"Oh, isn't it just too perfectly sweet?" cried her nine sisters, clapping their hands and laughing merrily, all together. "It *is* sweet, isn't it? It's love at first sight! It's just the sweetest thing ever! *Isn't* it just too sweet for *anything*, though?"

But while they were still running on in this fashion, and the elderly Highwayman was cheering faintly and the one-armed young man was cheering lustily, a loud roar came from the genie, and we saw that the witch had slipped from his grasp and was even now dashing in at the door of the hut. She shut it behind her with a bang, and the one-armed youth pounded against it in vain.

"The stolen hair!" he cried. "The genie's hair which she stole from me! I must get it back! Don't let her get away!"

### *The Genie Breathes Fire Upon the Witch's Hut*

The genie opened his great mouth and roared with anger; then he stooped down over the hut, and I saw that he was

breathing fire upon the roof from his nostrils; and as the sparks caught in the dry thatch, he began to walk around the hut, bending and breathing fire upon its roof from place to place. In a few moments it was ablaze from end to end; the walls caught; and as I held my fair lady trembling close beside me, the house arose in flames, crackling and roaring, and showering sparks upward into the twilight sky.

"Oh!" said my fair one, clinging to my arm. "The poor witch! Save her! She will be burned to death!" But the genie's thunderous laugh was her only answer.

We watched until the fire was out, and there remained only a heap of smoking ashes; and the witch was gone.

"Oh, the poor thing!" said my beautiful lady.

"Isn't it terrible?" said her nine sisters, among themselves. "It's just too terrible for anything! It *is* terrible, isn't it? It's simply terrible, it is, isn't it?"

The one-armed youth stepped up to the ruin and appeared to be looking among the ashes near what was once the door. He looked for a long time, and then he suddenly straightened up and cried, "Ah!"

He came toward us, and he was holding up in his hand what seemed to be a necklace.

"See!" he said, and I saw that it was a string of buttons, of large flat buttons, eleven of them, threaded on what seemed to be a hair; the same I had seen about the witch's neck.

"It is the genie's hair," said the young man, "the same that she stole from me; and it was this hair which gave her power to turn my genie to a dog and imprison me in

the wasp's nest. Now let me see these buttons; I must look at them with care."

He examined each one minutely; and when he had examined them all, he placed his finger on his lips and smiled knowingly; and while I held the hair he broke it and slipped off the eleventh button, inviting me to look at it closely. I looked and saw upon it, near the rim, a crooked black line, much like the imprint of a tiny, crooked stick.

*The One-Armed Sorcerer Performs Upon a Button*

He threw the button upon the ground, laughing, and took from within his gown a leather pouch, from which he sprinkled upon the button a black powder; and then he began to speak, in a loud voice, words which I could not understand, in the midst of which he picked up the button, now crusted with black; and still repeating his strange words, he swung his arm, and with a loud cry flung the button into the branches of the nearest tree; and there, hanging on to a branch of the tree, trying desperately to keep from toppling off, was the old witch herself.

Instantly the young man took the threaded buttons from me and slipped them off the hair; he wound the hair about his finger and cried,—

"Off with her! Off with her to the Forest Kingdom, far from here, and see that she never comes back again! Off with her, I say, to the Kingdom of the Great Forest!"

At these words the genie strode over to the witch and—

"Well, bless my soul," interposed the King, "what business did he have to send that witch here, I'd like to know?"

*So that's how she came to live in my Forest! A fine piece of work, I must say! A pretty how-d'ye-do, to send their cast-off witches over here! What business had he to—"*

*"Never mind, grandfather," said Bojohn, "do let him go on with his story."*

*"A fine piece of work!" said the King. "Of all the high-handed, brazen-faced—"*

*"My dear!" said the Queen.*

The genie strode over to the witch in three steps and plucked her down with one hand. He then tucked her under his arm like a sack of corn, and stood before the one-armed youth.

*"Stoop down!" said the young man.*

The genie bowed low, and the young man, to my surprise, reached up and pulled from the back of his head, at the neck, ten long hairs, one by one.

*"Away!" cried the one-armed youth.*

### *The Genie Flies Away With the Witch*

The genie stood up, and opening his great mouth in a silent laugh, stamped upon the earth so that it shook, and leaped straight up. He rose in the air in a wide curve; and before we could blink again he was gone like an arrow over the treetops, with the witch under his arm, and was no more than a speck in the evening sky.

The young man tucked the ten hairs away inside his gown.

*"Now," said he, "she's gone. And good riddance, too, I should say."*



"Sir," said I to him, "will you tell us who you are, and what brings you here?"

"I am a sorcerer," said he, "and I dwell in an island far out in the Great Sea. I am known there as the One-Armed Sorcerer. I came here, with the genie whom I command by virtue of a ring of his hair, in order to prove my skill against the witch. I undertook to release our good friend the Highwayman and his ten fair daughters, but I am bound to say that I managed it badly; so badly that the witch got the genie's hair away from me, and by means of that hair turned him into a dog and shut me up inside the wasp's nest. And all because I didn't know the rule, that you mustn't speak before you're spoken to."

"A pretty good rule," said I, "but if everybody observed it, 'who would ever talk?'"

"Well, anyway," said the One-Armed Sorcerer, "here I have ten buttons, and here I have ten threads from the genie's head. I propose to make you a doublet, sir; a magic doublet; and for the cloth, the wasp's nest will be the very thing. It will be a doublet worth having; and to you, sir, who have so nobly preserved us all, I will present it on—er—ahem!—on your wedding day."

"Hurrah!" piped up the elderly Highwayman, and the lady on my arm blushed.

"Oh, isn't that sweet of him?" cried her nine sisters. "Isn't it just too sweet for anything? It's really the sweetest thing, now isn't it? Too perfectly sweet for words, it is, really!"

The One-Armed Sorcerer, stepping over to the wasp's

nest, pulled it down from the tree without breaking it, and slung it on his back.

"Come with me!" I cried. "You shall all return with me to my father's castle. Will you consent to that?"

"Well," said the elderly Highwayman,—

"Though anxious to accommodate, I fear it's growing rather late, I seldom stay out after eight—"

"Oh, father!" cried his daughters, nine of them, together, "it would be perfectly jolly!"

"It would suit me to perfection," said the One-Armed Sorcerer.

"Oh, *won't* it be jolly? It *will* be jolly, won't it? Wouldn't it be perfectly jolly?" cried the nine young damsels, clapping their hands.

"Will you come home with me?" I whispered to the fairest of the ten, who had said nothing.

"If you wish it," she whispered, blushing again.

"Oh, aren't they just the dearest things?" cried her nine sisters. "It's love at first sight—oh, the dear things! Aren't they just simply too dear for anything? They *are* perfectly dear, now, aren't they? Really now, aren't they just too perfectly *dear?*"

### *The Prince Leads His Beloved Home*

Well, the long and the short of it is, we reached my father's castle late that night, under a starry sky. The attendants whom I had left in the forest had returned without me, and the castle was a-twitter with anxiety. But

when I led my fair lady into the great hall and presented her to my father, the King, and her nine sisters and the elderly Highwayman and the One-Armed Sorcerer stood bowing behind us, there was joy, I can tell you, and the rafters rang again.

My father, after a long look at the beautiful damsel at my side, and then at me, gave a long, slow whistle, without making a sound, and stooped and kissed her on both cheeks, nudging me with his elbow at the same time.

A cheer went up again, and my father took me aside and whispered in my ear.

"You rascal," said he, "I never thought you had it in you to— Really! You don't say so! You astonish me! A Highwayman's daughter! Well, well, think of that! Very original of you, my son; I'm sure I never would have thought of such a thing at your age. She's got a fine eye, my boy; there's a look in it I've seen in your mother's eye; a will of her own, you can't fool me about that look,—yes, yes, very beautiful,—but a will of her own, remember I told you. A Highwayman's daughter! That's good. Highly original. Well, well, it might have been the Hangman's daughter—but remember what I told you about that look in the eye, I've seen it before,—your mother used to—but she's certainly beautiful all the same—when does the wedding come off?"

*The Magic Doublet Is Presented at the Wedding*

We were married on the morning of the third day. Such feasting, such dancing, such merriment,—and gifts innum-

erable; but the best gift of all was a doublet, made with his left hand by the One-Armed Sorcerer from the skin of the witch's wasp's nest, fastened by the witch's ten buttons sewed on with the genie's hair; a doublet to preserve the wearer from all harm. And this, as the wedding dinner was nearing its end, the One-Armed Sorcerer, rising in his place, presented to me with a pretty speech, for which I thanked him.

"Sir," said my father, addressing the One-Armed Sorcerer, "I invite you to remain with me at my court, to instruct my son in the mystery of handling a wife. Nobody but a sorcerer should undertake such a job. Will you try it?"

"Alas, your majesty," said the One-Armed Sorcerer, "it is far beyond my powers. And besides, I must return to my island home, on pressing business."

"Very well, then," said my father. He took my bride's hand in his and patted it, while she looked down in confusion. "My dear," said he to her, "you must persuade your sisters to remain here with us. And as for your father, I design to appoint him Lord Treasurer of my kingdom. I think a Highwayman ought to be a good man to take charge of my money. Will you persuade him to accept that office?"

"Oh!" cried the nine sisters, without giving my bride a chance to speak. "That *would* be jolly! Oh, *wouldn't* it be jolly? It *will* be just too perfectly jolly for anything, won't it? But really, though, *won't* it be jolly? Just too simply, perfectly, adorably *jolly*!"



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"Your majesty," said my father-in-law the Highwayman,  
rising up on his elderly legs,—

"Although I am not confident that I'm entirely competent, I thank  
you for the compliment,

I thank you most sincerely;

I fear I am not very quick in matters of arithmetic, but often when  
the answers stick

I get them,—very nearly;

And if at first I don't succeed I try again, although indeed I  
cannot say I always heed

Each wretched little fraction;

And anyway you must agree if one but knows his Rule of Three  
there's hardly any need to be

Acquainted with subtraction.

"I do not wish to seem to boast, of all things I detest it most,  
and yet I think I'd fill the post

Not very ill, not very:

From early youth I did betray, I've often heard my mother say,  
a really rather taking way

In matters monetary;

A simple little rule or two I always try to keep in view, to do  
what I am told to do,

And always speak politely,

And never make a saucy joke behind the backs of other folk, a rule  
which I have seldom broke,

If I remember rightly.

"My motto is a simple one, that happiness depends upon the con-  
sciousness of duty done

(Unless it's too unpleasant),

I value virtue more than wit, and as for riches, I admit I do not  
value them a bit

(At least, not just at present),

I think, however, I should state, that though I don't mind working  
late, I like to be at home by eight,

When supper's on the table;

And thus, in words of simple art, I thank you, Sir, with all my  
heart, and promise I will do my part

(At least, as far as able)."











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